

Asian material culture

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Asian Material

ASIAN MATERIAL CULTURE

Edited by

Marianne Hulsbosch *(senior editor)*

Elizabeth Bedford and Martha Chaiklin *(co-editors)*

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS



ASIAN MATERIAL CULTURE



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FOREWORD

Crossing the boundaries that too often divide 'Southeast' and 'East' Asia, the case studies in this volume provide a timely reminder of the great value of collaborative research. By the same token, they provide a testament to the ways in which the academic study of material culture has evolved to become an interdisciplinary field incorporating a wide range of participants, approaches, and topics. Furthermore, if we accept that the contextual study of structures, monuments and artifacts such as tools, weapons, costumes, ornaments provides a methodology by which to understand something of the beliefs and attitudes of societies other than our own, then the door to 'Asia' opens up limitless possibility for comparative investigation. All too frequently exhibited as static objects disconnected from the societies that produced them, the examples of material culture discussed here are repositioned as dynamic articulations of rich social lexicons.

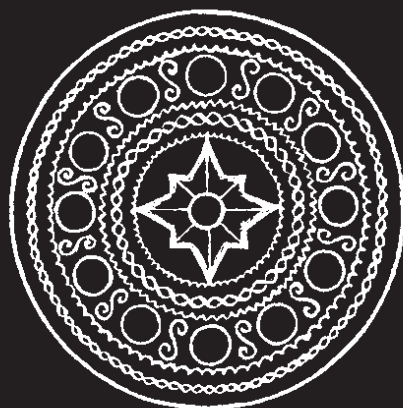
The combination of theoretical sophistication and research specialization that characterizes *Asian Material Culture in Context* offers a solid basis for the exploration of several recurring concerns. As several authors show, the shifting values attached to objects as varied as moon cakes or beaded slippers can only be understood in relation to changing historical processes. The forms of cultural production through which personal or group identity can be expressed have much in common, whether the focus is Japanese prostitutes in Edo, Christians in Ambon, Peranakan Chinese

in Singapore and Malaysia, or the Miao minority in China. Close attention to the ownership of ‘objects’ and to the skills required for their production provide an insight into the self-perceptions of those disadvantaged by the written record. Women’s hairstyles and ornamentation, like beadwork, weaving and embroidery, can thus be read as texts that offer revealing statements about acceptance or negotiation of social status. The very portability of objects, food and cultural practices raises intriguing questions about the changes induced by relocation into a new environment and the global influences of commercialization and Westernization. For overseas Chinese communities, for example, the Lion Dance and the celebration of the Mid-Autumn festival have become important statements of contemporary identity even as they recall legends associated with a homeland’s distant past.

All the essays in *Asian Material Culture* convey an important message. Human beings express both their individuality and group affiliation in innumerable ways that reflect the particularities of changing historical and social contexts. Decoding the subtleties of these shifting cultural statements demands a unique combination of skills – the knowledge of local languages, the ability to tap what might appear unpromising material, and the commitment to collaborative and interdisciplinary communication. The contributors to this volume display these skills to a very high degree. In showing how an appreciation of material culture can foster greater cross-cultural understanding, they have also reaffirmed the relevance of such research to our increasingly internationalized and interactive world.

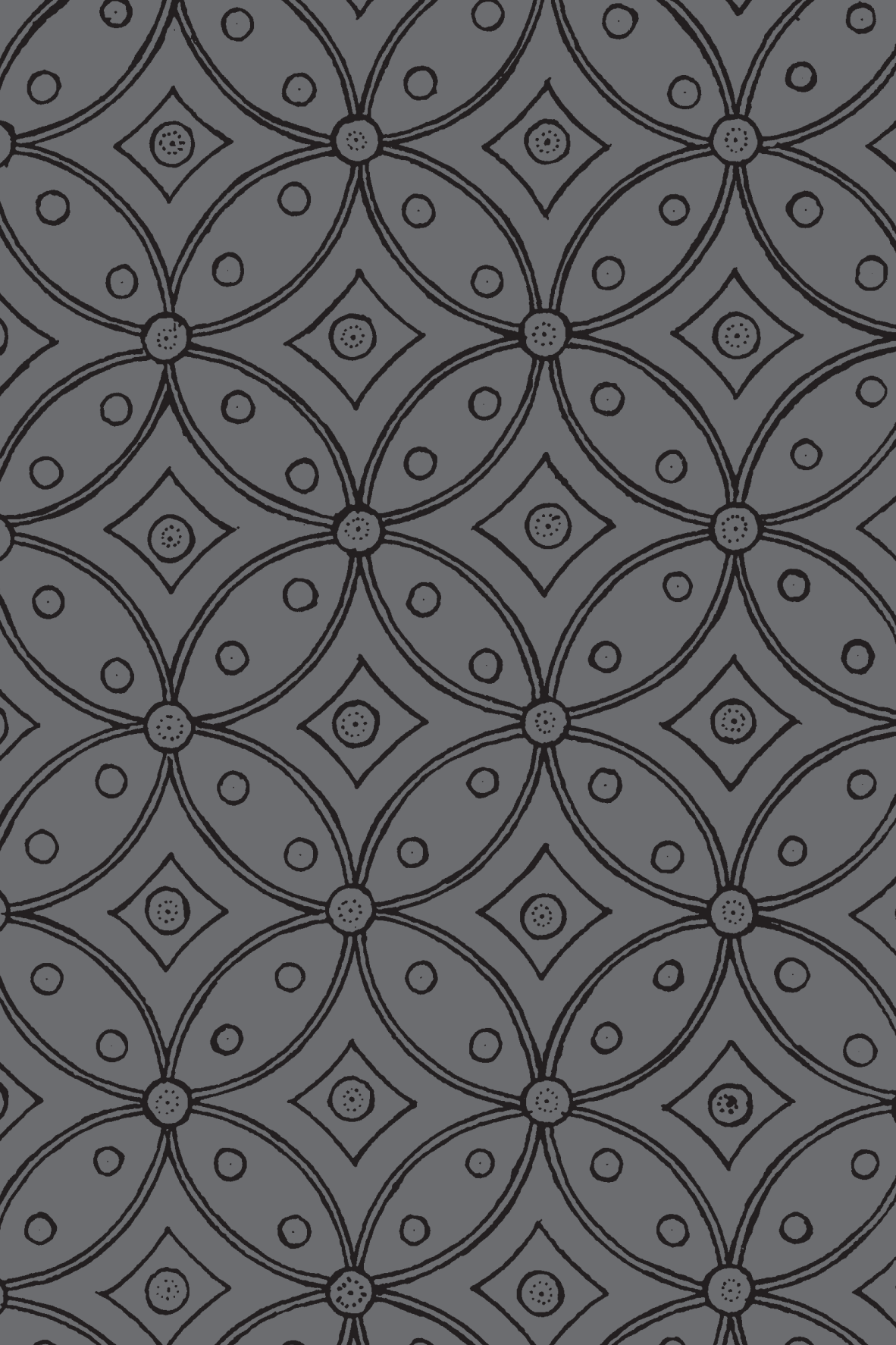
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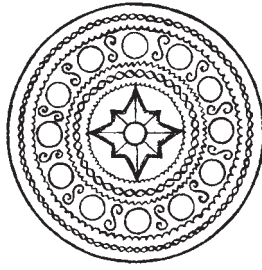
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ASIAN MATERIAL CULTURE IN CONTEXT

Marianne Hulsbosch, Elizabeth Bedford
& Martha Chaiklin





ASIAN MATERIAL CULTURE IN CONTEXT

Marianne Hulsbosch, Elizabeth Bedford & Martha Chaiklin

Material culture encompasses the tangible object, its unique features, production and usage, which in turn imparts the object's cultural meaning as well as the conscious or unconscious, obvious or circuitous beliefs, values and ideas of a specific community or society at a given time. Indeed, as represented in this book, material culture has been the focus of scholars working in diverse fields ranging from the Arts and Sciences to Cultural Anthropology and Archaeology, to name but a few.

Citing the Oxford English Dictionary, Buchli (2004) points out that the first time the term 'material culture' appears is in 1843. 'However this preoccupation with artifacts is by no means new in human history. People have been preoccupied with objects in and of themselves from Babylonian temple assemblages to Ancient Roman and Chinese antiquarians up to the collection of curiosities (or *Kunstammer*) that proliferated in Renaissance Europe', Buchli (2004: xxvii). From such beginnings the study of objects as a means of understanding past and present societies began. As an academic idiom, material culture roughly coincides with the formation of the profession of anthropology in the late nineteenth century. Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) was perhaps the first to really grapple with the term in *Sex and Savagery* (1927). At about the same time, Lucien Febvre (1878-1956), one of the founders of the *Annales* School, began incorporating the study of material culture into his historical research. The writings of his pupil, Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) served to popularize this phrase. Most recently, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) has affected the intellectual application of material culture through influential studies such as

Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984). He is extensively cited by many of the authors in this volume. Conversely, for some, the ideas of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) about the archeology of knowledge provide a useful approach.

As this brief historiographical introduction suggests, material culture is 'a border zone claimed by geographers and economists, archeologists and anthropologists' (Clark 1999). Nevertheless, materiality of culture, unique to the self and shared, is a phenomenon that clearly manifests personal and collective identity through objects, their construction processes and their usage. These entities, infused by technological development, intercultural encounters, innovation and entrepreneurship are manifestations and tangible evidence of self in society. However materialization of culture is not just a matter of constructing physical objects that reflect aspects of a social and cultural reality. At the heart of material culture lie continuous, dynamic relationships and social actions, which are forged between the object, self and society. From these relationships emanate a cultural understanding, knowing and actions that shape and locate the material reality of the object in human consciousness (Hoskins 1998).

Material culture and the materiality of culture are distinct but intertwined in that both material culture and materialisation of culture articulate and simultaneously shape society (Verbeek 2000). Their distinction lays in the fact that material culture is about the physical object (its material characteristics), as much as it is about subject and the person's cultural becoming (through the processes of developing and using the object) (see for example: Appadurai 1986; Strathern 1999; Tilley 1999). The object, its production and usage are the dynamic mediating factors that 'forge relationships between the self [or society] and others' (Miller 1987: 122). Producing and using objects bestows cultural meaning to these processes and the item involved. Articulating self or society through production and usage of objects formulates a specific visual identity, which is conveyed through the social transformation of cultural values present in the object (Miller 1987). Continuous development of material items, their production processes, usage, handling and overall treatment reveal a society in the process of constructing itself. This ongoing cycle of innovation creates a cultural identity that is 'fluid and distinct in its appearance, expression and personification' (Bourdieu 1996: 127; Griswold 2004; Miller 2005; Woodward 2005).

The exchange of the object, and the (ex)change of meaning over time is another perspective that explorations into material culture, and the materiality of culture brings about (Appadurai 1986; Bourdieu 1973). The consumption of material aspects of culture elicits a different dimension to materializing culture as meaning is constructed and reconstructed based on commodity (Mauss 1990). Meaning is invested in the physical object as well as the practice of production and exchange (Tilley 1999).

Therefore, the methodology of material culture can be condensed in to a single word: **context**. Material culture is the physical manifestation of some aspect of human society. Just what each type of object can tell is determined by the very unique circumstances which surround it. For that reason, a unique set of questions needs to be generated for each object that reflect its culture, time, society and place. This does not mean that there are no universal truths to be found, only that these truths need to be derived from empirical realities.

Many of the questions used to understand material culture overlap or are interrelated. Unless the object has an embedded text such as, for example, Shang dynasty ritual bronzes from China or an embroidery sampler from the colonial United States, much of the study of material culture will still come from texts. Nevertheless, a sense of the physical nature of the object is essentially situated in the lives of those who used it. For example, Japanese armor is usually characterized as 'light,' but this is only in relation to European armor. It still required considerable strength to be able to manoeuvre in it. The study of material culture requires the same rigorous questioning we are accustomed to give to texts.

The focus of this volume is the materialization of socio-cultural identity through objects, their creation and usage, imparting agency on the items as well as their associated practices. The examination of material culture then, allows for the creation of typologies and histories of specific societies. This volume therefore gives the reader a unique insight into the materiality of Asian cultures and the ways in which objects and practices can embody and also exhibit individual as well as collective identities, aesthetic and functional characteristics, human and spiritual aspirations.

These features are clearly evident in the vibrant clothing of the Miao people of southern China. Their use of colour, literally materialized through textiles,

has commodified the visual presence of their ethnic identity, ready for an ever-increasing tourist market.

The artful Lion dance is another form of material culture which lies in performance, where the collaborative efforts of the dancers will best be understood by viewers who can 'read' their costumes and acrobatic moves and how these performances resonate through Chinese diasporas.

The time of Mid-Autumn festival in China is a time of reaffirmation of shared family values and consolidation of cultural identity, expressed through the making, giving and imbibing of moon cakes. During the festival the moon cakes are central to Chinese ritual; it is the actual exchange of this item that materializes culture. The meaning of shared personal connections; family values, traditions and beliefs are metaphorically represented by the materiality of the object and the practice.

The Peranakan Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia have nursed a deep-seated anxiety about their survival as a community and of late there appears a determined renewal in articulation of identity through Peranakan material culture of food, historic artifacts and the revival of Peranakan heritage.

The practice of hairstyling and the use of associated paraphernalia take us to Japan and the central Maluku islands of western Indonesia. The material possibilities of identity formation are explored through the development and usage of hair jewellery of indigenous Ambonese women of Indonesia. During Dutch colonial times in Indonesia, maintenance of ethnic identity was integral to continuation of cultural distinctiveness.

The rhetoric of identity is also grounded in the materialization of Japanese hair ornaments of the late Edo period, where the narrative of international trade and change is evident in the way hair styling and the usage of combs and other ornaments is perceived. Materials and usage developed directly from the unique combination of economic, political and social factors that comprised early modern Japan.

Cultural definition, change and exchange through the Pua Kumbu of the Iban women living in Sarawak, Malaysia is another investigation into material identity construction. In particular the current tension between so-called traditional, or indigenous, textile production and contemporary production

for global markets is explored; making the Pua Kumbu cloth the ultimate expression of material consumption.

The study of material culture, of how the social and cultural context of artifacts distinguishes one way of life from another continues to be reviewed and reassessed on many levels especially in terms of ‘habitus’, to use a Bourdieuan term, and how an individual’s views and customs are externalised in their practices, perceptions and beliefs. Admittedly material culture can be approached from so many different perspectives: from the conceptual to the utilitarian to the symbolic, many of which overlap. That said, it should be noted that what the essays in this book emphasise are the myriad of ways in which people use objects, practices and cultures to structure and to communicate their identities. In its broadest sense ‘material culture’, can consequently be seen as a linchpin that not only defines a people or practice but brings them together, often operating on a number of levels that transform, create, signify a particular time, place, society, attitudes, beliefs and practices that draw from the past but at the same time adapt to the present.

The chapters in this volume are subsequently representative rather than exhaustive in their portrayal of Asian material culture. Nevertheless, they clearly demonstrate that the objects, seen as material evidence of culture, are entities that resonate with discourses of human relationships, personal and collective identity formation, ethics and values, histories, determination of ethnicity, local and international trade, consumption and above all distinctive futures. It is through ongoing construction of material objects and the materialization of self and society that social transformations and futures are forged.

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MOON CAKES
AND THE CHINESE
MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL
A MATTER OF HABITUS





MOON CAKES AND THE CHINESE MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL A MATTER OF HABITUS

Elizabeth Bedford

Asian material culture can be discussed within the framework of the annual Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, *Chung Chiu*, and in particular the giving and receiving of moon cakes (*yuèbǐng* 月餅), as they are known in Mandarin, and the ways this specific custom and culture are linked. Given this context, the essay sets out to discuss the underlying symbolism of moon cakes and their meaning, their historical and seasonal significance as well as the fact that the festival is also steeped in legend and mythology, even extending to the fundamental canon of Taoism.



A traditional
Cantonese-style
moon cake

Situated within this general framework, the discussion will focus on the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) concept of 'habitus', namely socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and or predispositions, in particular the deep seated generative principles of thought, perception, appreciation and action associated with this festival and how the celebrations, related stories, codes of behaviour, attitudes and beliefs not only connect the Chinese people in a way that distinguishes them from other ethnicities but reflects the complex values of the broad culture in which they operate.

Different readers of Bourdieu approach his writings from various perspectives depending on, to use his own phraseology, 'the field', or setting, in which they are operating (Reed-Danahay 2005: 3); a term Bourdieu (1993) defines as '... a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy' (Bourdieu 1993a: 162). In this essay, I write from the position of what Riessman (1993) describes as 'a privileged, white, Western woman' (Riessman 1993: 11), a specialist in Museum Education who has spent the last eight years living in Asia. This essay is subsequently written within a framework of critical inquiry, with its focus centering on understanding the (informal) cultural formation of a new generation's habitus, indeed the folklore; the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of the Chinese culture, celebrated by this particular group of people commemorating a particular festival in Chinese communities around the world. In addition, the ways in which this ritual has and is being transformed within a particular ethnic setting, reproducing specific cultural praxis and capital.

The term 'folklore' is used as defined by Sims and Stephens (2005) as not being 'high art' or part of 'official' culture' but 'informally learned, unofficial knowledge we share with our peers, families and other groups ... [of] people who share personal connections, values, traditions, belief ... that in part define them as a group' (Sims & Stephens 2005: 3-5). Hence, the stories told, the practices enacted and the messages constructed in the context of this celebration can therefore provide an extra dimension of understanding to an individual's existing knowledge. This 'informed experience', which is a cumulative, multi-dimensional process, characterises the way in which people locate themselves by recognizing who they are, their origins and place within society.

For example, what is the significance of the legends and stories being told and the customs practiced? What is so unique about the items produced and purchased at this time? To what extent are these objects representative of particular values? Such questions take me into what Bourdieu refers to as ‘the backrooms, the kitchens of science’; to reveal the environment that produces the people and their material culture (Bourdieu 1993b: 158).

BOURDIEUIAN TERMINOLOGY

Habitus can therefore be defined as what goes on inside the individuals’ heads. In this respect habitus is embodied in the people as it only exists in, through and because of their practices and interactions with each other and with the rest of their environment, and as such is a collective and homogeneous phenomenon. It is therefore a product of a place and time, which produces individual and collective practices in accordance with the scheme of history. The ‘praxis’ – or actions – of this group are also a fundamental component in such traditions being perpetuated. Therefore, the categories of understanding and perception that constitute a habitus tend to reproduce the very structures of the field. In this way Bourdieu saw habitus as the key to social reproduction because it is central to generating and regulating the practices that make up social life.

As such, the relationship between habitus and field is a two-way association as they can only exist in relation to each other. While a field is constituted by the various ‘social agents’ – individuals who operate in this field or society – participating in it (and thus their habitus), a habitus represents the transposition of objective structures of the field into subjective structures of action and thought of the agent which are based upon a ‘doxa’ – ideas, beliefs – they all consider so valuable that they don’t need to question them. To illustrate this point (in the field of cultural production, in this instances the celebrations associated with the Mid-Autumn Festival), all the agents agree that certain customs are important, practices no-one questions. Inside the field however, like in any social field, there will be disagreement based on the notion of what practices or values are more preferable or ‘important’ than others. The agents who define these practices and values will attain the highest social positions in a field. For example, the Empress Dowager Ci Xi of the Qing Dynasty

(1644-1911) celebrated this festival in an especially elaborate manner, setting a precedent in so far as the importance that should be accorded the occasion (Xing 1988: 54).

Today China is undergoing rapid change, as a consequence of which the Chinese habitus is being reshaped to accommodate both traditional beliefs with the surrounding manifestation of modernization, globalisation, consumerism and changing mores. So while some of the old beliefs such as making offerings to the moon are no longer practiced others are fervently adhered to. Considered in terms of this essay, Bourdieu's various concepts offer a useful sociological vocabulary for analysis and description of the festival, its associated beliefs, practices and customs.

HABITUS AND THE MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Bourdieu contends that the struggle for social difference is a fundamental dimension of all social life. He argues that the social construction of reality is not carried out in a vacuum; cognitive activities are themselves structured because they have social origins. Habitus entails these social origins. From this standpoint each individual or 'social agent' is equipped with a habitus that is shaped in formative years by their home culture, that bears affinity to a larger referential group.

Using Bourdieu's framework of fields, structures, habitus and capital, we can gain a more comprehensive picture of the practices most associated with the Mid-Autumn Festival such as lion dances, playing mah jong, attending Chinese Opera, lantern parades, the giving and eating of moon cakes as being not only instances of institutionalised cultural capacity but visual or material manifestations of the Chinese society, what Rothkopf (1997) describes as 'living artefacts... carried forward through the years...', customs Bourdieu (1986) links to the concepts of fields and habitus, namely upbringing and education, associated with a specific group of people, their social orthodoxies and heterodoxies, indeed their way of life (Bourdieu 1986).

So, set against the festival's apparent commodity fetishism is what many Chinese see as an opportunity to reaffirm and consolidate their identity, to express their difference, at the same time maintaining the continuity of particular values

especially in younger generations and links with other Chinese communities both in the Mainland and abroad. Indeed, it is the opportunity to inculcate specific values and customs that plays an important part in the construction and reproduction of ‘cultural capital’, the Bourdieuan term for power, which individuals may achieve through particular forms of knowledge, the knowledge being conveyed from one generation to the next (Bedford 2003: 73). The actual experience is therefore most important in terms of the meanings and values associated with this particular celebration as Young (2006) declares ‘habitus is therefore not a mere personal choice, nor a social necessity, but the way in which society is embodied in practice’. This, he explains, ‘is not [an] abstract or universal [principle], but generated by social practice, just as it generates this practice’ (Young 2006: 28).

FOLKLORE AND THE CHINESE CULTURE

Possessing rich cultural meaning and an extensive history, long-established festivals compose an important part of Chinese culture; a situation which is all the more venerated given China per se does not have Western style holidays but rather a stipulated number of annual holidays. While minority peoples in China also have their own unique festivals, these annual holidays primarily revolve around six major festivals and are often referred to as ‘Three for the Living’ and ‘Three for the Dead’. The former refer to the Lunar New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival while the latter three consist of the Pure Brightness Festival or *Qing Ming*, the Festival of Hungry Ghosts and *Song Han Yi*, which takes place on the first day of the tenth month; a time for sending winter clothes to the ancestors (Latsch 1984: 7). Upon further consideration the actual celebrations can be classified into four categories: 1) those celebrating an historical event or historical figure; 2) those linked to a myth or a legend; 3) those told by one generation to the next, developed from rites worshipping ancestors and deities and 4) those occurring at the end or the beginning of a year.

Given the Mid-Autumn festival is generally considered the second major event of the Chinese calendar (the Chinese New Year being considered the most important event of the year), it is celebrated by Chinese people living not only in Greater China but around the world; ‘Greater China’ referring collectively to

the financial markets and economies of mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) the number of overseas Chinese in 2007 had reached 35 million, a statistic which confirms the fact that the population of overseas Chinese (people of Chinese birth or descent who live outside China), is the largest migrant group in the world today. Yet despite their willingness to assimilate, adopting the ‘culture’ and customs of the country in which they reside, the majority choose to consciously maintain their Chinese identity through celebrations such as this.

Therefore, events such as the Mid-Autumn Festival are especially significant as they are not only about participating in celebrations and telling stories, which in turn connect people, they are in many ways a validation of the past, a means through which to bestow upon younger generations the necessary cultural capital needed to act, think and talk in relation to the social orthodoxies and heterodoxies established by the field, thereby instilling a sense of belonging to a particular group or ethnicity (Bedford 2003: 74). In Hong Kong for example, with a population of almost 7 million, comprising many ethnic groups, asserting a communal identity is considered particularly important; a sentiment that has intensified since 1997 with Hong Kong’s return to Chinese sovereignty. Indeed, Martin (2007) argues that in ten years since the handover there has been ‘a general re-evaluation and re-examination taking place in Hong Kong about its identity’. In fact as habitus includes the idea of its having a generative power, as being something acquired and belonging to the social sphere, community life and identity-formation in Hong Kong have come under increasing scrutiny when considering the degree to which this identity is influenced by ‘nationalism’, ‘colonialism’, politics and the changing global economy (Chun 2002).

NATURE AND FAMILY

Since the affluent Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) when traditional festivals liberated themselves from primitive practices and centred on the actual celebrations, the customs have continued relatively unchanged with family gatherings, prayers, fireworks, feasting and opera, to name but a few.

Each year the festival takes place on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon, in mid-autumn when the moon is most luminous, and is at the outset a harvest

festival, a time when farmers gather crops and pray to the moon for a good season next year, for protection and prosperity. As well as relating the vicissitudes of life to changes of the moon it is, as previously stated, a family occasion as the Chinese believe the full moon symbolises reunion; moon cakes are also known as ‘reunion cakes’, a material metaphor embodying the occasion’s social relations. In fact, given many Chinese families today do not have relatives living in close proximity, parents expect their children to return home for this celebration – be it from other parts of the region or even abroad. So even though this is not a statutory holiday, the Mid-Autumn Festival has assumed an unofficial institutional legitimacy.

While variations occur within different Chinese communities, it is during this period of celebration, on the evening of the actual festival, that most Chinese families will gather together. Indeed, visits with parents and grandparents on this day are part of the doxa in that they are expected. This reminds people of the importance of the family clan, and the generational ties that bind a family together. On this occasion prayers are offered with the customary lighting of incense and red candles. Food items possessing symbolic significance are also placed on alters as offerings to deities and ancestors, after which a special meal is held. Indeed, such is the importance of this time that the praxis includes an empty chair being placed at the dinner table even if a family member can not attend, to symbolize that person’s presence at the meal. Following the meal, which usually includes moon cakes, deep fried chicken, roasted pork, yam, water melon seeds and Chinese tea, the family will go outside to view the moon; children will be told the story of ‘Lady of the Moon’ and the ‘Moon Rabbit’ as well as hear poems dedicated to the moon, such as Su Dongpo of the Song Dynasty’s (960-1279) poem:

A small piece of cake to eat as if crunching on the moon; Tasting like shortbread with maltose inside (Xing 1988: 55).

In Guangzhou in South China, a huge lantern show is a part of the celebration with thousands of differently shaped lanterns lit to form a spectacular contrast with the moon. In Hong Kong, the festival is also held in conjunction with the Lantern Festival. Many families will go to the Peak, overlooking Victoria



A child wearing traditional Chinese costume and holding a lantern

Harbour, or Victoria Park to see the hundreds of brightly lit lanterns and the *Tai Hang* Fire Dragon Dance, where a 66-metre long Fire Dragon created from thousands of burning joss-sticks dances through the Park. In Sydney, Australia, where I now reside, local councils with large Asian populations such as Hurstville, Parramatta, Cabramatta, and Kogarah collaborate with local businesses in organizing Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations. Regardless of location however you will invariably see children carrying lighted lanterns around the area, supposedly showing the way for adults to pay their respects to the moon, to celebrate life, to think of relatives and friends not present, extending best wishes to them.

Here the *habitus* and *praxes* associated with this occasion are what ensure the perpetuation of certain ideologies pertaining to the social agents of the field; in other words, *habitus*, the acquired system of ‘rules’ where individuals’ conscious and unconscious thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production are most evident. Bourdieu uses the word ‘capital’ to describe the social products of a field such as thoughts, actions and objects through which individuals interact. Using the example of exchanging gifts, in this instance moon cakes, Bourdieu shows the explicit and implicit meanings associated with this custom and how the giver and receiver behave according to a number of assumptions (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Similarly, families celebrate the occasion according to various customs and beliefs that contain both explicit and implicit meanings.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS, STORIES AND TAOISM

As previously mentioned, Chinese celebrations can be classified into four categories: 1) historical events/figures; 2) myths/legends; 3) ancestor/deity worship and 4) commemorating the beginning/end of a year, however the Mid-Autumn Festival is perhaps a little unusual in that it comes under two categories: the first and second. The first category in so far as it is a time when people recall the 14th Century uprising, when the Chinese over-threw the Mongols. This was a time, according to legend, when Chinese rebels wrote the call to revolt on pieces of paper and hid them in the cakes that they smuggled to fellow citizens. The cakes were allegedly shaped like the moon and along with their message stuffed with sweet fillings and so this day is also

known as the ‘Moon Cake Festival’, however when the custom actually began no-one knows.

The second category: celebrating a particular myth or a legend relates to a rather whimsical story focusing on the Lady of the Moon, Ch’ang-O (嫦娥), whose image is often imprinted on moon cakes. She is in fact the subject of several legends in Chinese mythology. The story I most often encountered is set around 2170 B.C. It begins with the Emperor ordering Ch’ang-O’s husband Hou Yi (后羿), an Archer, to shoot down nine of ten suns circling the earth. Once the task was achieved, the Goddess of Western Heaven rewarded Hou Yi with a pill that would make him immortal. However, Ch’ang-O found the pill, took it, and was banished to the moon as a result. She became very lonely without her husband on the moon but she did have company, a rabbit, referred to in Chinese mythology as the Jade Hare, who made elixirs also live there.

The story is also considered Taoist in its leanings, focusing on the concept of yin and yang; yin, the dark side supposedly relating to women and the moon and yang, the light side, referring to men and the sun. Chinese believe everyone has some yin and yang in them and Taoism says that it is important to keep them balanced and one way to do this is to spend time with family and loved ones. This sentiment is echoed again in the moon cakes and lanterns which often have the words ‘longevity’, ‘harmony’, ‘wealth’ and ‘good fortune’ imprinted on them.

In listening to the two stories it is believed understanding is gained as to who the Chinese are as a cultural group, with all their diversity. People, especially children, are often fascinated by stories of long ago, and they have an innate curiosity about their own origins, their identity and place within society. The making or purchasing and giving of moon cakes are an important part of the experiential learning and children have great fun while unofficially learning about the origins, myths and legends associated with this celebration. Admittedly, making moon cakes is not a modern-day phenomenon as they are not only labour intensive but few traditional Chinese families have an oven.



A traditional wooden
moon cake mould

MATERIAL CULTURE AND WESTERNIZATION

According to Shanks and Tilley (2007) ‘material culture actively mediates ideas and practices’ in fact it is ‘its role as an interface between people, the environment, and interactions of individuals regarded as components of social systems’ (Shanks & Tilley 2007: 82-83). The material form of the Mid-Autumn Festival is subsequently most evident in the moon cakes, the range of choice and their elaborate packaging, as well as lanterns. Depending on the habitus, praxis, and agents however the items will be used for a variety of purposes, appropriated and incorporated into different symbolic structures according to the historical tradition and social context. Dellino-Musgrove (2005) states:

People engage with the world through materiality... creating and projecting their social identities through the use and manipulation of goods. Therefore, material things contribute to the creation of complex interactions between people (Dellino-Musgrave 2005: 220).

The giving of moon cakes as gifts is an example of such exchanges. Indeed, the French anthropologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss’ (1990) argues that gifts in traditional societies are more than a simple commodity changing hands but a representation of every aspect of the society it is part of. This phenomenon ranges from the practical, social, economic, political and personal (Mauss 1990), and is one Shanks and Tilley (2007) explore, stating that ‘... artefacts constitute a code of signs that exchange among themselves...’ (Shanks & Tilley 2007: 89). Citing Baudrillard (1981), Shanks and Tilley contend that ‘a theory of material culture simply cannot be established in terms of biological needs and their satisfaction, but must be based on a theory of signification and regarded as a symbolic production, part of the social constitution of reality...’ (Shanks & Tilley 2007: 89). This is again reflected in Bourdieu’s habitus-field theory where the rationale behind the exchange of moon cakes is, as far as business is concerned, a practice to build stable and long-term relationships in order to survive and accumulate capital in the market where competition is fierce (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).

Consequently the once humble moon cake that was purchased in a brown paper bag has become not only an important commodity in terms of filial and business relationships but a somewhat flamboyant show of wealth with elaborately packaged bags and boxes of moon cakes being traded back and forth between families, friends, colleagues and business associates. In fact the actual cakes are sometimes accompanied by gifts that far exceed the value of the cakes, leading to accusations that gifts of moon cakes are simply an urbane form of bribery, conversely others argue a convenient way to oblige someone in a position of power!

The Chinese habitus has obviously changed over time reflecting not only influences of globalization but China's unprecedented pace and scale of urbanization and economic progress and the moon cake is indicative of such change. Whereas once they took up to four weeks to make, automation has greatly accelerated the process. Inter-cultural appropriation has also occurred with many exotic moon cake varieties available throughout Asia including reportedly 'healthy' moon cakes being packaged in biodegradable trays.

The traditionally round or rectangular moon cake, consisting of approximately 1,000 calories, measuring about 10 cm in diameter with a 4.5 cm thick pastry filling containing four salted egg yolks now competes with multinationals like *Starbucks*, *Nokia* and *Haagen Dazs*, the latter for example producing ice-cream moon cakes in Asian markets. These well-known Western brand name cakes or even moon cakes displaying branding that uses Western influences, are especially popular as many young Chinese seek to emulate Western standards, which have long been viewed as 'aspirational' (Punchard 2006).

So, while the material culture will hopefully remain Chinese in spirit, the dominant trend is the increasing Westernization of the Chinese habitus, especially in the younger people, their tastes and wants. Before 1949 and the 'Mao-era', toy shops even sold a large range of toys to mark the occasion. Pictures of the Lady of the Moon, Ch'ang-O', or the Jade Hare could also be bought (Latsch 1984: 76). Today the praxes includes different types of lanterns being produced especially for the occasion, ranging from lanterns in the shape of carp, butterflies, stars or boats, each possessing its own legend and symbolising certain qualities, to lanterns emblazoned with popular heroes like *Doraemon*, Superman or the Japanese manga and anime characters like *Pokemon* and *Pikachu*.



Decoratively boxed
moon cakes



Nokia
moon cake



CONCLUSION

Whilst the festival incorporates legends and myths, possessing historical and seasonal overtones as well as Taoist teachings, it is the sweet tasting, round moon cake that most people associate with this festival. So, juxtaposed against the actual festivities is the merchandising that is inextricably linked with these celebrations.

It is widely acknowledged that different places produce different cultures that are in turn defined by their shared dispositions and lifestyles as well as shared practices. New thoughts and concepts will come into being due to the communication and the collision of different cultures. Without a doubt, exchanges will bring about changes in the Chinese habitus that includes both traditional and modern values. By looking at the physical objects, in an environment, be they as simple as moon cakes and lanterns, their significance and symbolic meaning, it is possible to gain some insight into the culture that produced them. That said, each generation has continued to give form and meaning to the Mid-Autumn Festival and what it means to be Chinese, not only enacting traditions passed down over the centuries but endowing it with a somewhat multifaceted, dynamic character, unique to the time, place and people.

GLOSSARY

<i>Capital</i>	The social products of a field such as thoughts, actions and objects through which individuals interact.
<i>Chung Chiu</i>	Meaning the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival and in particular the giving and receiving of moon cakes.
<i>Culture</i>	The term 'culture' is used in this essay to mean a set of learned beliefs, values and behaviours; the way of life shared by the members of a society.
<i>Doxa</i>	Ideas, beliefs, social agents consider so valuable that they don't need to question them.
<i>Field</i>	Bourdieu uses the concept of 'field' to refer to a setting in which people are operating, independent of those of politics and the economy.
<i>Folklore</i>	In the context of this essay 'folklore' is understood to mean informally learned, unofficial knowledge about a community, the beliefs, culture and traditions, that is expressed through customs, actions behaviours and materials.
<i>Habitus</i>	The socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or predisposition.
<i>Material culture</i>	In the context of this essay this term refers to the tangible possessions of the Chinese culture that represent symbolic and or communicative meaning, history and values and the processes of enculturation that occurs through these objects/practices.
<i>Praxis</i>	Actions.
<i>Social agents</i>	Individuals who operate in this field or society.
<i>Song Han Yi</i>	The Festival of Hungry Ghosts which takes place on the first day of the tenth month; a time for sending winter clothes to the ancestors.
<i>Qing Ming</i>	The Pure Brightness Festival.

<i>Taoism</i>	One of the two major religio-philosophical traditions (Confucianism) that have shaped Chinese life for more than 2000 years.
<i>Yuèbǐng</i> (月餅)	‘Moon cakes’ as they are known in Mandarin.

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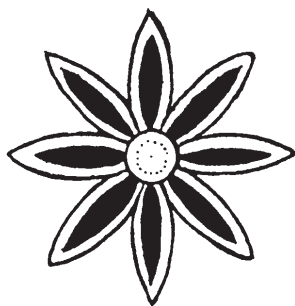
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UP IN THE HAIR
STRANDS OF MEANING
IN WOMEN'S ORNAMENTAL
HAIR ACCESSORIES IN
EARLY MODERN JAPAN





UP IN THE HAIR STRANDS OF MEANING IN WOMEN'S ORNAMENTAL HAIR ACCESSORIES IN EARLY MODERN JAPAN

Martha Chaiklin

Hair splitting is a colorful metaphor for the trivial, so it might seem the explosion of hair accessories for women in early modern Japan that actually split hair must be equally trivial. Baron Ino Dan, who headed both the *Mitsui zaibatsu* after his father's assassination in 1932 and the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai (Society for the Promotion of Culture Abroad) a non-governmental association devoted to promoting Japanese culture to counteract charges of barbarism in Asia, propounded this view. He assembled a collection of hair accessories that was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Chicago Institute of Art in 1936.¹ He wrote that, 'This collection of head-dresses and personal effects of Japanese women does not represent, in the least, Japanese art nor the expression of artistic sense of the Japanese.' (Priest 1936: 121). Dan does allow that the meaning of Japanese hair ornaments could be found in the fact that they were 'instrumental in swaying their [Japanese women] mental lives from day to day.' Baron Dan's remarks are a typically gendered view of ownership that devalues objects that are exclusively female and thus not worthy of study.² However, there are specific reasons as to why hair ornaments proliferated during the early modern period in Japan.



Woman's hair circa 794-1185. Woodblock print by Keigasa, mid nineteenth century. Collection of the Library of Congress

Baron Dan offers one suggestion as to why most hair ornaments developed during the Edo period (1603-1868), the historical period that coincides with early modernity.

Hair Dressing was the very heart of the beauty of Japanese women; that is why there are many variations of combs, *kogai* (ornamental bar for the hair), and *kanzashi* (ornamental hair-pin), and why so many techniques in making them have been developed (Priest 1936: 54).

Indeed, long black hair was an important facet of beauty for both men and women. As in many cultures, hair represented youth and vitality. The saying went, ‘long hair hides seven defects,’ meaning that beautiful hair could make up for a lot.³ It was said that hair was a woman’s life.⁴ Beautiful hair was so important that there are even tales of women committing suicide because their hair was not attractive enough. (Takeshi 1933: 550). Men’s hair had been bound, first in imitation of Chinese styles, and then with the rise of the warrior class, to better fit under helmets. There was no such clear reason to explain why women’s hairstyles, which had remained long and loose until the Edo period, underwent a radical change from long, natural or oiled hair which showed-off its beauty, to stiff, heavily pomaded styles that could easily mask defects like thin or unattractive hair.

If not caused by aesthetics, one might suppose that hair ornaments developed from religious and superstitious beliefs relating to hair. After all, the word for hair in Japanese, *kami*, is a homophone for the word for ‘god.’ Hair was in fact believed to provide a direct connection to the gods. For example, the forelock on children was left uncut because it was believed that this is what the gods would yank on if the children were in trouble.⁵ By extension, hair implements were the source of superstitions. For example, combs could be used to tell the future by standing at a crossroads, singing an incantation three times, scattering rice, sounding the prongs of a comb three times, drawing a line, and then listening to the words of the next three people to cross the line. It was a common enough practice that fortune tellers would set up shop at popular crossroads. Additionally, a thrown comb was a curse (Santō 1975:216). Combs were even considered bad luck to give as gifts because the Japanese word, *kushi*, is a homophone for disaster and death. As revealing as all of these beliefs are about the spiritual worldview of the

early modern Japanese, they do not explain the sudden popularity of women's hair ornaments in early modern Japan.

What then of the secular? Even before the Tokugawa Shogunate was established, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) had begun a process of creating a separation for the warrior class from the rest of society. The founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), furthered this process, officially adopting Neo-Confucianism as a political ideology. In this Japanese mutation of the Confucian world order, warriors were at the top of a class structure that ideologically descended to farmers, artisans and placed merchants at the bottom. The shogunate headed a loosely confederated union of semi-autonomous domains held together by oaths of loyalty. For this reason early modern Japan has sometimes been characterized as feudal. Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) began his classic work, *Theory of the Leisure Class* with the following:

The institution of a leisure class is found in its best development at the higher stages of the barbarian culture; as, for instance, in feudal Europe or feudal Japan. In such communities the distinction between classes is very rigorously observed... (Veblen 1965: 1).

Although there was something of a leisure class and Veblen's ideas on conspicuous consumption are relevant, the official class structure of the Tokugawa shogunate is a red herring for understanding hair ornaments. For one thing, a number of people, such as actors, prostitutes, doctors and priests did not fit into any of these categories. While the last two may not be relevant to the discussion because they shaved their heads, the first two are. Nor, were class divisions as rigorously observed as Veblen believed. The development of hair ornaments in Japan was a result of the specific economic conditions of early modern Japan.

WHAT ARE HAIR ORNAMENTS IN EARLY MODERN JAPAN?

It has been estimated that there were as many as 280 different women's hairstyles over the course of the Edo period (Hideō 1997: 60). These elaborate variations, to some extent, indicated whether a woman was married or unmarried, what



Several kinds of *kanzashi* and other hair products. The bowl at the right was for lip color. Horai Hidenobu. Woodblock print. ca. 1820 Collection of Library of Congress

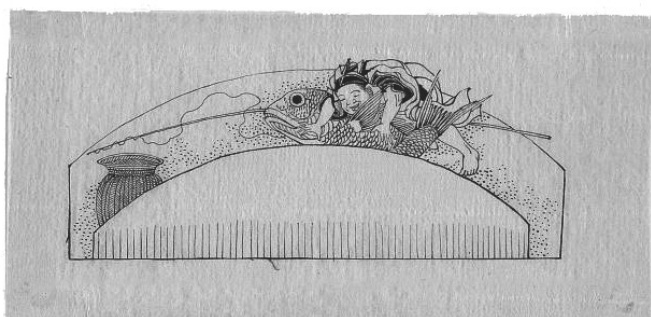
social class she belonged to, and her profession, but these parameters shifted as different styles became popular, were imitated and discarded.

A married woman in early modern Japan was supposed to have at least sixteen items as a part of her toilette. These included hair oil (usually from camellia), pomade, tweezers, tooth black, eyebrow black, face powder, and a number of implements to form the elaborately bound styles known as *mage* (Morisada 1992: 74). Some hair accessories were purely functional and not obvious to the casual observer, such as forms for shaping hair, or functional hair pins.

Some of the most widely used ornamental accessories included:

Motoyui – a braided tie used by both men and women to tie the hair together at the nape of the neck. These were in use since the Nara period (645-794), if not earlier. Although originally of braided silk or hemp fibers, in the Edo period *motoyui* were often made of colored paper string. They had many specific names, depending on the width and type of material used. *Motoyui* could be purchased or made at home. Although a functional item, because they were visible, *motoyui* could also be decorative.

Kushi – In 1847 Santō Kyōzan began the section on combs in his work on women's dress, with the line, 'If there are people, there is hair, and if there is hair, there should be combs.' (Santō 1975:187). As Kyōzan opined, the use of combs to maintain, hold, and decorate the head is almost universal, crossing chronological and geographic boundaries. In Japan, the origins are ancient; lacquered wood combs from the Middle Jomon period, some five or six thousand years ago, have been excavated. These ancient combs were often lacquered red, to serve as sort of a protective talisman (Okazaki 1989: n.p.).



Comb. Drawing from 1878 from earlier work. Collection of the Library of Congress

Combs for holding back hair and those for neatening it existed long before the Edo period but combs of a purely ornamental nature did not appear until the early seventeenth century and spread with the changes in hairstyle. Shapes could vary from crescent to square.

Kanzashi – a bodkin or ornamental hairpin with one or two prongs. The origins are unclear but because many had a small spoon for cleaning the wax out of the ears on the protruding end, it is sometimes suggested that it evolved from a tool for cleaning ears. The pronged ends could be used to scratch the scalp underneath elaborate chignons. Another widely-held theory is that *kanzashi* were created in imitation of the fashion among entertainers to stick branches of plum flowers in their hair. Yet another hypothesis suggests that the origins lay in sheathed knife carried by women of the warrior class to use in case of dire need (Küchler 1885: 128-129). Regardless, after they appear in the late seventeenth century, they were common to all social classes (Katō Eioan 1971: 16).

Kōgai – a flattened rod about six to eight inches with flared, and sometimes elaborately decorated ends. Hair was wrapped around the plain center piece. In the Heian period (795-1185), *kōgai* were used by both men and women of the imperial court in imitation of Chinese styles. By the Edo period, styles had changed enough for both men and women that *kōgai* were used exclusively by women.

That all of these implements came into use by nearly all classes of women in the seventeenth century is widely accepted, but just what part of the seventeenth century is disputed. According to early nineteenth century nativist historian Kitamura Nobuyo, courtesans did not wear combs until the early 1680s, and other women did not use them until the eighteenth century (Nobuyo 1929: 228). His works were referenced by Santō Kyōzan and other Edo period historians adding weight to this opinion, but it is apparent that ornamental combs were not only in use, but considered essential by a much earlier date. A story from around 1689 entitled ‘Spending a Day at the Employment Agency’ Ihara Saikaku (1642-1703) describes the dress of servants:

But even if no one offers a girl a job and she becomes like a masterless samurai, she clings to her one fashionably printed kimono, her wide silk sash, her one pair of cotton split-toed socks, and her silk floss veil and ornamental comb, for these things are as important to her as the long and short swords are to a samurai: she would rather go without food for three days and drop dead than part with a single one of these items.⁶

Ihara Saikaku was a fairly prolific novelist who describes daily life during his time in such accurate detail that even later Edo period historians used him to understand the past. That the use of ornamental combs should be an essential part of dress for a servant suggests that they were no longer merely part of the demi-monde. The ornamental comb as badge of respectability for a maid to a good house suggests sartorial conservatism rather than fringe behavior, and therefore widespread usage.⁷

DEMI-MONDE AS FASHION LEADER

Long flowing hair had been an aristocratic convention. Men's styles changed because the reins of power shifted from the imperial aristocracy to the warrior class. Shifts in women's hair styles were not the result of random acts of fashion, but similar social transformations. The Edo period was immediately preceded by a period characterized by Japanese historians as *gekokujo*, or the bottom rising to the top. Essentially, lower levels of the warrior class rose to power through the process of a long civil war. Thus, women who worked and therefore had to bind their hair brought these customs with them as they rose in social class.

As a unified Japan settled into peace, urbanization occurred around the castle in each province. In order to control a potentially subversive and disruptive element in society, in 1589 Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ordered that prostitutes, who had been licensed since 1512, be confined to one quarter of town. As a result, a distinct culture formed around the most significant of these licensed quarters in the main cities of Edo (now Tokyo), Kyoto and Osaka. Elaborate chignons are one such style. Some scholars believe that these prostitutes began wearing their hair this way in imitation of those worn by their favored customers – young men who had not yet shaved their forelocks. The removal of this front clump of hair was a sign of manhood, and until this occurred at a ceremony called *genpuku*, the long locks needed to bound out of the way.⁸ Evidence of this can be found in the works of Ihara Saikaku. A story called 'The Almanac-Maker's Wife' begins with a group of young men, critiquing each woman who passes. The most lovely of all came last:

Next attended in a lordly manner by lackey's carrying a palanquin, came a girl barely thirteen years of age. Her long hair turned up slightly at the ends and secured with a scarlet band. Her forelock stood out and was parted like a young boy's, the coiffure being tied with a paper cord of gold and decorated with a comb of immaculate beauty...

The girl in the story is of merchant class and has probably imitated the styles of courtesans who imitated young men. Her sense of sartorial style was seen as a positive attribute.

The Shimada and its multitude of variations is a perfect example in how a hair style moved out of the demimonde into society at large. This very common style was usually worn by unmarried women and at wedding ceremonies. Its origins have been traced to a licensed prostitute (*yūjo*) on the Tokaidō highway, or alternatively, a *kabuki* actress from the 1620s, who would also have been a prostitute. Other sources suggest a *kabuki* actor by the name of Kankichi or Mankichi or Hanakichi, also a low class profession. Regardless as to which one of these traditions is true, the style spread from the lowest segments of society to become common, essentially the opposite trajectory as that suggested by Veblen.

Since *mage*, or chignon, styles evolved on the fringes of society, it is therefore no surprise that the methods by which they were ornamented also evolved from these quarters. Decorative combs reputedly spread from Shimabara, the bordello section of Kyoto, in the first half of the seventeenth century. Some styles started even lower. A fashion originally started by dancers in the second quarter of the eighteenth century and worn even now by girls dressed in the long-sleeved kimono of youth, *hana kanzashi* were made of silver and gold movable pieces and strips of colored paper or silk that jingled and fluttered as the wearer moved. Later other materials were used. From the dancers they spread to maids of Yoshiwara, who were courtesans in training, and finally to the population at large.⁹

The *nimai gushi* (two-comb) was a style in which two combs were inserted into the front of the hair. It started in Osaka with women in the public baths, who were usually unlicensed prostitutes and spread to the higher-class world of licensed prostitution. Some attribute this style to the necessity of bathhouse women to have one comb to use on patrons, and another ornamented lacquer comb in imitation of their higher class counterparts (Santo 1975: 214-216).



Courtesan with three combs, and maids with *hanakanzashi*. Woodblock print by Choryusai. Eighteenth Century. Collection of the Library of Congress

This fashion spread from Osaka to Kyoto and ultimately Edo. By the late eighteenth century, two combs became three. The styles of courtesans were nearly always exaggerations of those worn by other women. If those outside of the bordello districts wore one comb, the prostitutes would wear two, if regular women wore two, prostitutes used three. This was also true for *kanzashi*. Most women only wore one or two at a time. From perhaps the late eighteenth century onward, it became the fashion for courtesans to wear a half a dozen or more. As long-time Dutch resident Germain Felix Meijlan (1785-1831) in early nineteenth century Japan described it:

How many more of these pins [*kanzashi*] a woman wears in her hair, the more elegant she is coiffured, and sometimes the number runs as high as four or five on each side. The whole then forms around the forehead, a half circle of sticks, that look like the slats of a fan (Meijlan 1830: 86-87).

Similarly, British Consul Rutherford Alcock (1809-1897), British minister to Japan from 1859-1864, described women's hair as housing a 'forest of pins' (Alcock 1863: 537). The implements of prostitutes were also usually larger than those worn by women outside the so-called pleasure quarters.

Although prostitutes and entertainers seem to have been the primary source for fashion, other customs spread from different sources. One type of *kanzashi* was called the *hirauchi*. It consisted of two prongs with a large flat piece in the form of a disk, diamond, hexagon, flower or other shape. Women of the warrior class usually wore these made of silver or some silver-like metal. The flat surface was frequently embossed or chased and often had a family crest. The two prongs were so that if a woman, who in the warrior class might be trained in combat, was attacked, she 'was to pull out the hairpin and stab her assailant in the eyes with the two-pronged end' (Kikue 1992: 51). When this type of ornament spread to the demi-monde, it became the fashion for the women there to put the crest of their house or that of their wealthiest patron. Conversely, patrons might have the comb or *kanzashi* with the crest of their favorite courtesan to advertise their intimacy. Pretentious men might obtain such a comb without ever even having been associated with the courtesan in question.¹⁰ The ornaments were valued because their possession of this sort of very personal object implied intimacy. Another ornament that did not originate

in the bordellos is the ornamental *motoyui*,¹¹ a thick cover for the functional motoyui that was decorated with silver, gold, or pictures. It was originally used by the children of the Kyoto aristocracy but by the nineteenth century this ornamental tie was used exclusively by elite women, both of the aristocracy and the warrior class (Kitagawa 1992: 157).

SUMPTUARY LAWS AND SOCIAL CLASS

Given that Neo-Confucian ideals of class structure, restraint, and frugality generally guided government policy, it is of little surprise that sumptuary laws were issued periodically throughout the Edo period. Several of these proclamations dealt specifically with hair accessories. According to Alan Hunt, sumptuary laws are a response to factors of modernity such as, ‘urbanization, the emergence of class as the pervasive form of social relations and the construction of gender relations in these ‘new’ conditions.’ Hunt attributes sumptuary legislation to anxiety about the changing world (Hunt 2003: 62-63).

The earliest sumptuary law concerning hair accessories was issued early in 1704, which prohibited the use of gold, silver, and *maki-e* (gold or silver lacquer) on hair accessories. In 1743, another series of sumptuary laws were issued which included the same prohibitions as above but added that recently, the extra large hair accessories in the Kamigata style (Kyoto-Osaka region), with pronounced *maki-e*, or gold and silver parts and those with high prices should cease production. In the third month of 1789, the shogunate mandated that ‘Gold should never be used for combs, *kōgai* or *kanzashi*. Those of silver and tortoiseshell should not be large and the buying and selling of worked, expensive pieces should cease immediately.’ Apparently not finding this effective, six months later the following directive was issued: ‘Gold combs, *kōgai* and *kanzashi* are of course prohibited, and not only should production of silver and tortoiseshell worked goods of high value be halted, but combs should not cost more than 100 silver pieces and *kanzashi* and *kōgai* should only be of low cost’ (Ryosuke 1959: 32-33). The final sumptuary law of the shogunate was issued in the final year of isolation for the shogunate, 1853. It reaffirms the previous laws.

Another series of laws was directed at imports, such as that which banned coral in 1668 (Kinreiko 41-48). Tortoiseshell in particular, was banned at various times. For example, Matsudaira Sadanobu issued one such law entirely prohibiting tortoiseshell in 1789 (Viallé & Blussé 1999: 200). Tortoiseshell was, however, a very popular material, so in response, merchants changed the name of the product, from *taima*, to *bekko*, the common term today, to continue to sell tortoiseshell without attracting the attention of authorities (Kitagawa 1992: 162).

Contrary to Hunt's definition, social class is not the focus of the sumptuary laws for hair accessories or the materials that made them in early modern Japan. These laws are not even directed at users and do not actually regulate what is worn. Rather, the laws are an attempt to regulate production, defining what can be made and sold. At the heart of the issue was anxiety, not about class, status or gender, but currency. By the eighteenth century, when these laws were issued, Japan had shifted almost entirely to a cash economy. This economy was based on rice production but relied on the circulation of gold, silver and copper to function. Gold and silver mines had already been depleted to the extent that export of gold and silver had been halted. The 1704 law was issued on the heels of the devastation of a massive earthquake, fires and aftershocks, and marked the beginning of massive currency reform. The timing of the 1743 laws seems odd in that the period of dramatic fiscal reform instituted by Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (r.1716-1745) was completed over five years previously. Nevertheless, Yoshimune was still tinkering with currency issues and passed some currency-related laws around this time, including forbidding the custom of putting six copper coins in coffins, as wasteful. The laws of 1789 were issued during the so-called Kansei Reforms under the direction of Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758-1829), advisor to Shogun Tokugawa Ienari. These reforms came on the tail of severe famine, a major volcanic eruption and corruption in government and were directed at financial retrenchment. Similarly, in 1853, reforms were made to the currency market because of a shortage of coinage. The bans on imports were likewise directed at limiting the exports of currency metals. All of these laws sought to ensure that necessary currency was not removed from the market rather than at enforcing status distinctions.

MATERIALS AND CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

When gold and silver were prohibited, fashions for other materials arose (Katao 16). Some merely imitated gold and silver, like brass or tin, others were equally valuable. Perhaps the material most commonly associated with hair ornaments was tortoiseshell. It is strong but light and the yellow and brown tones are fairly neutral, which meant they could be used by any age in any season. The tortoiseshell used in Japan was from a fairly small species of sea turtle known as hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), so called for their protruding mouths. These turtles are found only in tropical waters. Tortoiseshell was not used widely in ancient Japan – according to Santō Kyōzan only for ‘jeweled obi’ – probably some sort of belt (Santō 1975: 204). The use of ornaments made from tortoiseshell appear to have spread from the Ryukyu Islands to Nagasaki (Kitamura 134). The Kingdom of Ryukyu was annexed by the Satsuma Province in Japan in 1609, perhaps securing supplies. Tortoiseshell craftsman kept their techniques secret but the techniques gradually spread from Nagasaki to Kyoto, Osaka and Edo.¹²

In 1635, the shogunate issued a proclamation that forbade travel abroad. It is therefore interesting to note that use of tortoiseshell in Japan postdates the enactment of self-imposed isolation, not becoming popular in Edo until the 1660s (Santō 1975: 211). Given that they were formed from imported materials by specialized craftsmen, tortoiseshell hair ornaments were generally expensive. A merchant’s handbook from 1719, for example, rails against the amount of money put into hair accessories and complains that tortoiseshell is so common that even low class women wear it. The author carps that even a luxury like tortoiseshell wasn’t enough, the tortoiseshell was further decorated with gold and silver.¹³ Germain Felix Meijlan (1785-1831), Dutch factory head in Deshima, Nagasaki from 1826 until 1830, shows that if anything the tendency became worse. He writes:

A set of these [tortoiseshell] ornaments is very expensive, running two hundred to five hundred taels. The needy underprivileged who can not purchase these wear imitations of white horn; the poorest make do with boxwood (Meijlan 1830: 87).

Meijlan was writing from Nagasaki, which was close to sources for tortoiseshell. It can be surmised that these materials were even more expensive in other parts of the country. Santō Kyōzan echoed Meijlan's observations, noting that because no woman could really be without a set of tortoiseshell hair accessories, their high cost the caused many a woman to suffer.¹⁴

Imitation tortoiseshell made from water buffalo horn was sometimes called Chosen (Korean) tortoiseshell. The demand for these imitations even caused water buffalo horn to become quite expensive so that by the 1780s, cow horn was used. Horse hoof was also a popular alternative around this time. These imitations were so clever that it as difficult for an amateur to discern its veracity but the horse hoof dulled after a couple years (Santō 1975: 211). Imitations were also a way to go around sumptuary laws, because as stated earlier, none of the laws issue penalties for wearing or using hair ornaments of any kind, but if supplies could not be found, these imitations provided alternatives.

Meijlan mentioned boxwood as a cheaper alternative to tortoiseshell, but in fact the type of boxwood most favored for hair ornaments, yellow boxwood, is only found in the Ryukyu Islands, Okushima or Satsuma, all located in the southernmost parts of Japan, and was thus relatively rare. Moreover, although yellow boxwood was partially valued for its hardness, it therefore required great skill to carve. Other preferred woods included exotics like ebony and sandalwood, although certain domestic woods like cherry and plum and bamboo (which is actually a grass) were used as well.

Other favored materials were equally costly and rare, and included baleen, coral and ivory. Combs were also imported from China.



A Japanese crane. Ando Hiroshige. Ca. 1830. Collection of the Library of Congress

Even something seemingly easily available domestically, such as the leg bones of cranes, which were used for *kōgai*, were a luxury item. Cranes were eaten, but only by elites and even then, restricted to special occasions such as New Years banquets. Commoners were not supposed to kill cranes because they were favored prey for hawking, a sport reserved for the warrior class. One crane leg bone could make four *kōgai* but there couldn't have been large quantities of crane bones available to craftsmen.

Thus hair ornaments represent a form of conspicuous consumption as defined by Veblen because by design and demand, they were made of the most expensive materials, materials that surpassed the minimum standard of need. Although serving no utilitarian function, they provided a form of respectability.

CONSUMPTION AND CONTINUITY

Early modern Japan is still viewed as a closed country, but hair accessories show just how fluid this isolation was. Nearly all desirable materials that were used in producing hair accessories were imported. All the tenets of conspicuous consumption detailed by Thorstein Veblen make perfect sense in this context. Ihara Saikaku bemoaned this trend in a story called 'The Extravagant Wives of Wholesalers.' He jokes, 'The hair comb may cost two *ryo* of gold, but wouldn't a woman balancing three *koku* of rice on top of her head attract more attention?' (Tonomura 1990: 592-623).

However, in early modern Japan there may have been an additional incentive in that women had been barred from receiving inheritance of money or land since the fourteenth century.¹⁵ One tool for passing some wealth to daughters and ensuring their futures became their dowry. Unlike some cultures in which a dowry was a payment to the groom's family, or to the couple, in Japan a dowry remained with the wife so if the couple divorced, the property was returned along with the wife. By the mid-Muromachi period, (1333-1573), it had become common for a special comb box (*uchimidare no hako*) to be included in the dowry displayed at weddings. In the Edo period the expectation was that a comb box and comb stand would be included as part of a wife's dowry for all but the poorest.¹⁶ Traditionally, Japanese women did not wear jewelry and therefore it is possible that expensive and elaborate combs and other

hair ornaments were one way to provide women with some portable assets. The desire for silver and gold in particular may have been because these are the most convertible.

Hair accessories were not only acquired at the time of marriage, but, if circumstance permitted, they were acquired throughout a woman's life. Among the merchant class, hair ornaments may have similarly been a way to hide and maintain wealth. Generally women's possessions such as hair accessories were exempt from attachment if the merchant husband went bankrupt. By pawning hair ornaments the couple could escape poverty (Saikaku 1965: 20-21).

Because the parts were small and delicate, hair accessories were all prone to breakage. According to Baron Dan, a woman, 'sank into the depths of despair when one of her *kanzashi* slipped from its place in her carefully modeled coiffure and fell, broken, at her tiny feet!' ¹⁷ Valuable items were repaired. For example, tortoiseshell was mended by melting the broken edges together with iron tongs.

Not all hair accessories, however, were valuable heirlooms. It was one thing a woman could never have too many of, in order match her kimono, indicate season or occasion, or even, as Baron Dan suggested, mood. Therefore, hair accessories were frequently used as mementos and gifts. For example, in the nineteenth century, when glass had become less expensive, the *daimyo* of the Usuki province would purchase glass hair ornaments every time he made a trip to the temple in Asakusa. ¹⁸ Similarly, Rutherford Alcock, described the avenue of shops leading up to the main temple in Asakusa:

Trinkets for women – especially metal pins for their hair, and combs, almost the only ornaments they appear to indulge in; and perhaps to make up for any restricted use elsewhere, they sometimes carry a forest of these on their heads; pins with hollow glass heads filled with bright colored liquids, also seem to enjoy great favor (Alcock 1863: 307-308).

Given that they were worn close to the body, they were given to lovers as can be seen in another Saikaku tale in which a youth produces an ornamental comb to prove his relationship with the widow next door (Saikaku 1980: 17).

Before they were given, hair ornaments had to be bought. They could reach the consumer in a number of ways. The craftsmen themselves could have shops or sell to a wholesaler. In a guidebook to the city of Edo from 1824,



Itinerant seller of lip color and combs. Okamura Toshinobu.
Woodblock print. Ca. 1750. Collection of the Library of Congress

two comb retail outlets are listed, obviously belonging to the same house. Iseya Yahei, in *Asakusa Komagata-cho* acted as a wholesaler for other craftsmen but also produced combs on site. Iseya Gohei in *Tori Abura-cho* was probably the main branch and produced and sold boxwood combs.¹⁹ Although these are the only two merchants mentioned, it does not mean that there were not more as a guidebook by definition is selective. Sometimes craftsmen or salesmen would attend market or festival days at temples to sell their wares. Lampworked glass, for example was sometimes produced in front of the crowd to amuse and entice purchasers.

The most common dealer was a sort of general store merchant called *komamonya*. This type of merchant could own a shop or be a peddler. *Komamono* consisted of objects including ear cleaners, abacuses, ink, scissors, dolls, needles and stationary, and most certainly lower priced hair accessories. Because so many of them traveled, they ensured that styles would pass from city to city, and wealthier farm girls could look as decorative as their urban counterparts.

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN

Comb makers feature in the oldest collection illustrated collection of craftsmen, a picture scroll of poems from the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century. The craftsman (*kushi hiki*) saws off thin pieces from a rectangular block of wood. The texts adds that the ‘indentations are then cut into these small slices.’²⁰ In a prosperous workshop we can see the division of labor that is a component of proto-industrialization. Wood was sawed into sections by one man, cut by a second, and a third filed and ground the comb.²¹ The carver used a saw to cut the teeth of the comb, which required great skill to do evenly, neither too thin nor too thick.²² The earliest Edo period reference, *Jinrin kimozi* (1690), states that combs are made of a high altitude evergreen called *isu* (*Distylium racemosu*) and boxwood as well as exotic woods, ivory, hawksbill turtle shell, etc’. According to this source, the comb makers also sold *kōgai*, which were made from bamboo, horn, ivory and baleen, but these were made by different craftsmen.²³ Different types of hair accessories required different types of craftsmen because a variety of materials were used. For example, horn and ivory were usually carved by specialized craftsmen as was tortoiseshell, while

coral was carved by those who worked with stone. A finished piece could even require several types of craftsmen. For example, a carver might send out a finished piece to a lacquerer to be decorated with *maki-e*. Pieces might be made at one shop and assembled at another. For example, glass beads might be purchased from the glass worker and assembled by the metal worker.

In general, most craftsmen congregated in the three main cities, Edo the largest city and political center, Osaka, the commercial capital and Kyoto, the imperial capital. It is significant that much of the early change in hair and hair ornaments originated in the Osaka area. Osaka was the commercial heart of early modern Japan and there was a concentration of wealth there. However, by the end of the seventeenth century, even though Osaka remains a commercial center, Edo became more of the fashion heart.

Where did these fashions come from? Some, as discussed above, were in reaction to sumptuary legislation that caused the need for new materials by cutting off the sources of old ones. Most craftsmen were anonymous and illiterate so we know very little about them. Nevertheless, a few very famous artists have been associated with the design of hair ornaments. Ogata Kōrin (1657-1716), painter and lacquerer, produced combs. The famed *ukiyo-e* artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) created an entire design book of comb designs in 1822.²⁴ Some of Hokusai's designs were fanciful and impractical but many more were produced in workshops.

At least one designer was from the warrior class. Hiraga Gennai (1728-1779) is known to history as a scholar of western learning (*rangaku*) and botany, and as a writer. As a scholar of things western he spent time in Nagasaki, the only place where foreign trade took place. During one trip he acquired a quantity of aloeswood. This wood is actually *aquilalia*, an evergreen native to Southeast Asia and India,²⁵ which when attacked by a fungus, gives off a fragrant resin that has been used primarily for incense since ancient times. There are a number of varieties, but the specific type procured by Gennai is known as *kyara* in Japanese and is believed to come from Vietnam. Gennai thought it would be interesting to use the aloeswood he had picked up in Nagasaki to make combs. The combs had silver along the back. In order to market them, he presented one to one of the most popular courtesans in Yoshiwara. When she declared she would henceforth use nothing else, they became the talk

of Edo. Gennai went on to design another comb in the late 1770s known as the Sugawara. For this one, he created a comic poem (*kyōka*) which caused it to shoot to popularity, sold even by country merchants and ‘horse traders’ but it was a flash in the pan and died out equally quickly (Kitagawa 1992: 133, 137). I have not found an illustration or description of this comb, but it may have been ivory because a comb known to have been in the possession of the famous scholar and poet Sugawara Michizane (845-903) was made of ivory.

There are other examples of this kind of antiquarian interest expressed in a comb. Most famously perhaps this can be found in a type of curved comb called the Masako which came into popularity in the early nineteenth century because a picture of the personal effects of Hojo Masako (1157-1225), the so-called ‘Nun Shogun’ of the Kamakura period. It was originally produced in sandalwood. These antiquarian references may have some relationship to the rise of nativist thought which sought to understand Japan exclusive of foreign influences.

CONCLUSION

During the Edo period, an enormous variety of hair ornaments were produced in a dazzling array of materials. Certainly fashion played a part in this, but fashion in the modern sense of a style or mode with planned obsolescence requires certain conditions. These might include production capacity to produce volume, developed distribution routes and material wealth beyond subsistence. These factors all developed during the early modern period in Japan. As the Edo period progressed the standard of living increased, and hair ornaments increased in ostentation. For example, coral of which only tiny beads had been available in the beginning of the Edo period, came to be widely available in large beads and even entire combs. Things that had only been available to the wealthy were increasingly accessible.

We can attribute Baron Dan’s mischaracterization of hair ornaments as not representative of Japanese art to a gendered view of the world in which the things that women used were decorative rather than artistic (Gordon 1997: 237-252). Contrary to Dan’s opinion, great care was taken in the production of fine pieces of careful workmanship. Even famous artists designed hair ornaments.

Conversely, changes in hairstyle and hair ornamentation led to many social changes; professional hairdressers appeared, specialized craftsmen emerged. Complex hairstyles even led to changes in pillows. In order to maintain the carefully coiffed and oiled heads and avoid damaging bedding, the ‘box pillow (*hako makura*)’ was developed. It consisted of a narrow roll of padding on a high box designed to support the neck but not touch the hair.

International trade and increasing standards of living did not make hair ornaments inevitable but provided a fertile ground for development. Material culture by definition inherently has meaning because it is a physical representation of the society that produced it. Early modern Japan was a prosperous, society, with social distinctions certainly, but even more importantly gendered distinctions. Hair accessories the focus of property accumulation for women in a society where earrings, rings, bracelets and necklaces were not usually worn and there were legal barriers to inheritance. Elaborate and beautiful ornaments developed because Japanese women in Edo period Japan had to keep their wealth up in their hair.

ENDNOTES

1. The previous year he had cooperated with a textile exhibit organized by the curator at the Met too. See Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture – A Study in International Relations* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1992: 121).
2. Comparable men’s accessories such as netsuke and inro are studied exhaustively.
3. Alternatively, Gary Ebersole interprets this to mean that looks aren’t important when choosing a bride. Gary Ebersole, ‘Long Black Hair Like a Seat Cushion: Hair Symbolism in Japanese Popular Religion’ in Alf Hildebeitel and Barbara D. Miller, eds. *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998: 76). In this case, seven, is just an abstract number meaning ‘a multitude.’
4. *kami wa onna no innochi*.
5. ‘Kamigata’ in Otsuka minzokugakukai, ed. *Nihon minzokugaku jiten* (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1972: 167). For a discussion of this see: Ebersole, ‘Long Black Hair,’ pp. 75-104.
6. Ihara Saikaku, *Some Final Words of Advice*, trans. Peter Nosco (Rutland, VT, and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1980: 195-196). Saikaku’s works give numerous other references to hair ornaments.

7. See Veblen, *Theory*, (1965: 199-201).
8. See Ito, Takeshi, 561-563 and Ema Tsutomu, *Ema Tsutomu chōsaku shū* (Tokyo: Chūokōronsha, 1974: volume 4).
9. *Waga koromo*, 2: 7, Kiyushoran, 2: 131 Morisada 2: 90-91.
10. 'A young fellow like this [a pretentious one] will often carry on his person the crested comb of some high or medium courtesan whom he has not so much as set eyes on.' Ihara Saikaku, *Life of an Amorous Woman*, Ivan Morris, trans. (Norfolk, CT: New Directions Books 1963: 189).
11. Known variously as *e-moto yui*, *ire moto yui*, *keshō moto yui* or *ōmotoyui*
12. rikise joso, 210.
13. Chonin bukuro, 66.
14. rekisei 211.
15. See Hitomi Tonomura, 'Women and Inheritance in Japan's Early Warrior Society' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 32, No. 3 (Jul., 1990: 592-623).
16. Described in Ihara Saikaku, *This Scheming World*, Masanori Takanori and David C. Stubbs, trans. (Rutland, VT and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1965: 20-21).
17. Priest, 55.
18. Ego Michiko, *Inkyo daimyo no edo kurashi – nenchu gyoji to shokuseikatsu* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1999: 176-177).
19. 'Edo kaimono hitori annai' facsimile reproduction in Nishikawa Matsunosuke ed. *Edo chōnin no kenkyū* 6 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1974: 3: 503). The names contain the numbers 5 and 8, and although these did not necessarily represent birth order, it is unlikely that children would be named out of order.
20. 'Shichijuichi ban shokunin utaawase' in *Edo kagaku koten shusho* 46 vols (Tokyo: Kowa shuppan, 1977: 6: 95).
21. See, e.g. J.J. Rein, *The Industries of Japan* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1995: 337). Although Rein writes of conditions in the 1880s, he sought out traditional craft methods. Although this and the following reference date from the nineteenth century, they are both attempts to document traditional methods.
22. 'Shinsen hyakko ezu kushishoku rakkai' in *Fuzoku Gaho* No. 79 1894, n.p.
23. Asakura Tadahiko, ed. *Jinrinkinmo zui* (Tokyo, Heibonsha, 1990: 171-172). Also mentioned under the heading of horn carver, *Ibid*, 178.
24. *Imayō sekkin hinagata*.
25. Also known as agalloch, agalwood and eaglewood.

GLOSSARY

<i>Bekko</i>	鼈甲 Tortoiseshell. A word developed to circumvent prohibitions against tortoiseshell.
<i>Gekokujo</i>	下克上 The bottom rising to the top. Usually refers to the period of unification between 1560-1600 when those who had been less powerful warriors took control.
<i>Genpuku</i>	元服 Coming of age ceremony for premodern men in which the forelock was shaved, denoting adulthood.
<i>Hako makura</i>	箱枕 A hard, narrow raised pillow that supports the neck but does not rest on the top of the head to allow elaborate hair styles to remain undisturbed while resting.
<i>Hana kanzashi</i>	花簪 A kanzashi ornamented with artificial flowers. Usually worn by girls and young women.
<i>Isu (no ki)</i>	伊須(の木) A high altitude evergreen indigenous to East Asia (<i>Distylium racemosum</i> .)
<i>Kami (noke)</i>	髪 Hair.
<i>Kami</i>	神 God in the Shinto pantheon.
<i>Kanzashi</i>	簪 Ornamental hairpin, bodkin.
<i>Kogai</i>	筭 A cylinder or bar, usually three to six inches long, which is used to form some traditional Japanese hairstyles.
<i>Komamono</i>	小間物 Fancy goods. <i>Komamonoya</i> is a fancy goods seller.
<i>Kushi</i>	櫛 Comb.
<i>Kyara</i>	伽羅 Aloeswood.
<i>Kyoka</i>	狂歌 Comic or satirical poem.
<i>Mage</i>	髻 Chignon.
<i>maki-e</i>	蒔絵 Gold or silver lacquer.
<i>rangaku</i>	蘭学 Literally, 'Dutch Learning.' Refers to scientific knowledge from the west.

<i>taimai</i>	玳瑁 Tortoiseshell. From the hawksbill turtle. Archaic. Replaced in modern Japanese by <i>bekko</i> .
<i>ukiyo-e</i>	浮世絵 A woodblock print depicting images of daily life, actors and prostitutes.
<i>yujo</i>	遊女 Licensed and trained prostitute.

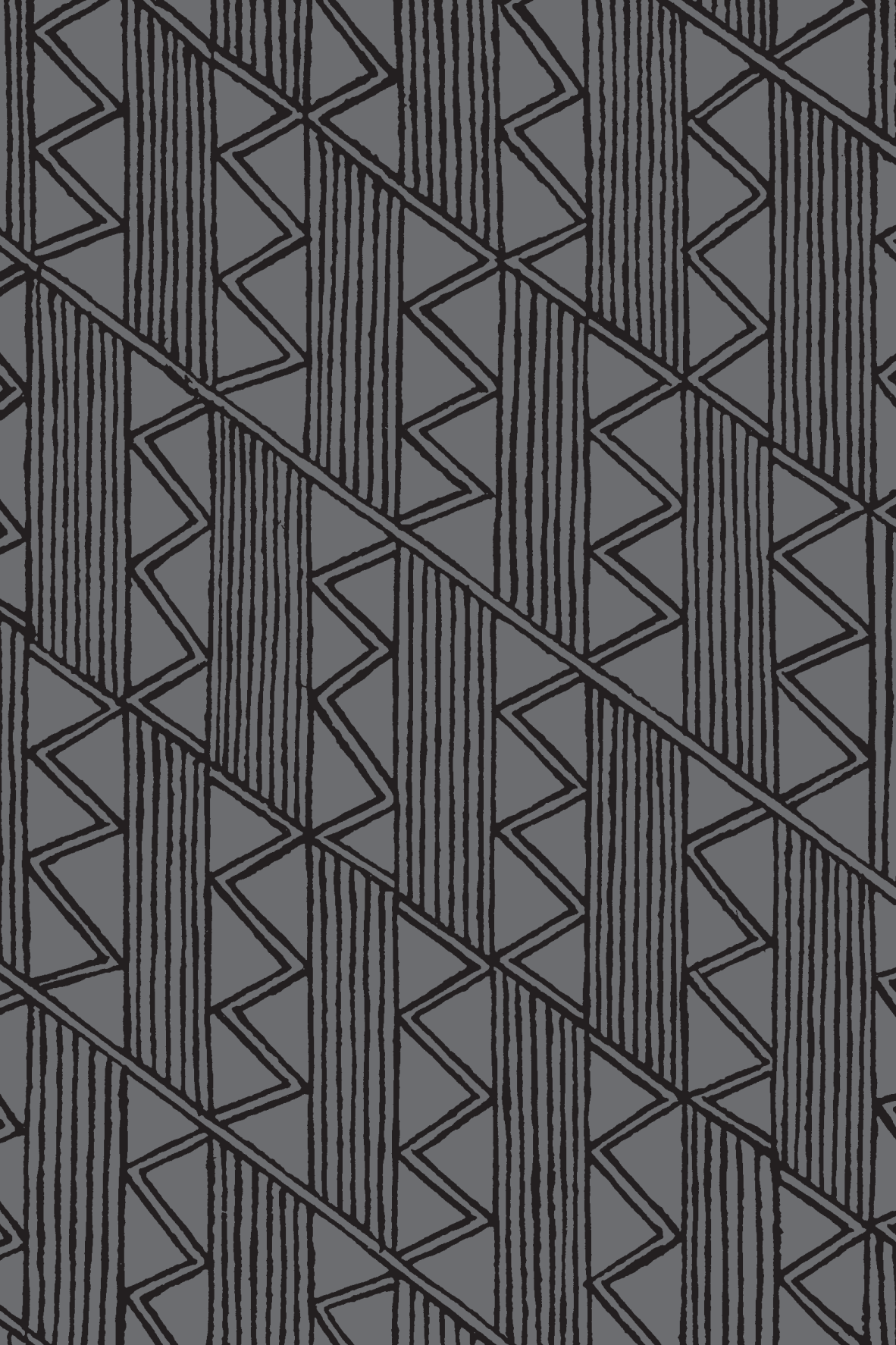
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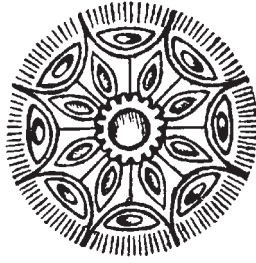
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NONYA BEADWORK
AND CONTEMPORARY
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NONYA BEADWORK AND CONTEMPORARY PERANAKAN CHINESE CULTURE IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA

Hwei-Fe'n Cheah

For the past thirty years, the Peranakan Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia have nursed a deep-seated anxiety about their survival as a community. These descendants of early Chinese migrants to island Southeast Asia had adopted local customs and ways of life whilst maintaining the religion of their ancestors.¹ They spoke Baba Malay (which incorporates words of Chinese dialect) and displayed certain external markers in terms of a preference for spicy food, adaptations of women's local dress – the tubular skirt (*sarong*) and long blouse (*baju panjang*) or hip-length blouse (*kebaya*) – and some local customs such as the chewing of betel (*sireh*). Whereas the Peranakans' adaptations probably eased their local interactions and facilitated their economic role as middlemen and traders, by the mid-twentieth century, the language and customs that had become firmly associated with Peranakan culture were rapidly becoming obsolete in a modernising world. Writing in 1984, Felix Chia, a prominent Peranakan playwright and author, lamented that his children did not speak Baba Malay and were not interested in learning about Peranakan customs because 'nobody does that anymore' (Chia 1984: viii). This threat of cultural loss endangered the Peranakans' distinctive identity and reinforced a widespread sense of the community's fragility. They had become, in Chia's words, a 'vanishing breed' with 'no future... as a community' (Chia 1984: viii, 193).

Ceremonial handkerchief
[sapu tangan], probably Malacca,
c. 1890-1910. Courtesy of
Lye and Lea, Singapore



The spectre of loss has engendered a sense of urgency, particularly within the Peranakan community but also amongst state-run institutions in Singapore and Malaysia, to preserve and transmit what still remains of Peranakan culture.²

Within this context, it is significant that *nonya* beadwork, one of the main art forms of the Peranakans, is enjoying a revival as historical artefact, hybrid chic and a leisure activity. Created with tiny glass and metallic beads, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century *nonya* beadwork drew selectively from Chinese, European, and to a lesser extent, local influences to create a recognisable art form. Used by the Peranakans, beadwork was often, although not always, made by the *nonyas*, the womenfolk of the Peranakan community. A few of these items may have been for mundane use, but the decorativeness of beadwork rendered them suitable as ornamentation for weddings and other celebratory occasions.

By the 1920s, however, although beading (as an activity) retained its roles as a marker of domesticity and a constituent part of the Peranakan cultural milieu, beadwork (as an object) was no longer an important part of wedding decorations. As the relevance of Peranakan culture itself came to be questioned in the mid-twentieth century, even *kasut manek* or beaded slippers were no longer a key wedding gift (Cheah 1990: 29). By the 1970s, the *sarong-kebaya* and *kasut manek* were worn in large part only by older *nonyas* and waitresses in Peranakan restaurants. Today, instead, they are popular in Singapore and Malaysia as fashionable dress.

With the waning of colonial power in post-war maritime Southeast Asia and the subsequent independence of Singapore and Malaysia, Peranakan communities have been buffeted by different politics, giving rise to heterogeneous contexts and identities. Yet, in the past twenty-five years, these communities have made a conscious effort to revive a sense of cultural pride and identity. *Nonya* beadwork, as object and activity, is implicated in the construction of this collective Peranakan consciousness. This essay seeks to understand how *nonya* beadwork is given resonance in our imagination today. In doing so, it reveals the ways in which the Peranakans' material engagements contribute to and sustain narratives that valorise beadwork, not only as an emblem of domesticity and Peranakan tradition but also as referent for contemporary constructions of Peranakan identity.

Tradition, examined in the next section, is used as a conceptual lens through which the contemporary meanings of *nonya* beadwork can be made

legible and interpreted. The recent renewal of interest in Peranakan culture is contextualised against a lengthy but necessary review of the discourse on cultural loss. Paradoxically, whilst the cultural 'revival' has increased the historical and commercial value of Peranakan artefacts, the desire to preserve risks not only reifying Peranakan culture but also stultifying the very process of cultural transformation that had characterised the dynamics of Peranakan identity formation. In showcasing *nonya* beadwork as one of the elements of Peranakan culture, the Peranakan community has had to engage with this paradox.

The essay focuses on the narratives generated **within** the Peranakan communities. State activity in heritage management is addressed only insofar as it provides the context for an understanding of the Peranakans' own attitudes. This approach neither ignores nor denies the politics of institutional and state involvement in cultural preservation and heritage management or the role of museums in the imaginary of the past (see, for instance, Bezzina 2006). It also does not address the related issue of authenticity of cultural artefacts when craft activities are commercialised. The scant treatment possible within the scope of this essay would not do justice to such areas that deserve sustained and detailed studies in their own right.

TRADITION AND ITS OTHER

The role of tradition in contemporary society has been the subject of extensive academic scrutiny and scholars have consistently emphasised its importance as a pervasive theme of modern life. The term 'tradition,' however, lacks a fixed meaning, ranging from its opposition to modernity (conceived as a break with the past) to its representation of cultural continuity (AlSayyad 2004: 6-8). In part, the varying understandings of tradition stem from the different ways in which tradition can be perceived in the present, making its meaning unstable and dependent on the function(s) which it fulfils.

Prefiguring *The Invention of Tradition*, an influential collection of papers edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), Edward Shils' (1981) study points to the pervasiveness of tradition in contemporary society. Shils acknowledges that tradition, which he defines as something that is handed

down over time, can be created 'from human thought and imagination,' so long as it embodies a quality of 'pastness'. He nevertheless interprets traditions as sets of 'essential elements' that persist and are 'approximately identical at successive steps' of their transmission and possession over at least three generations (Shils 1981: 12-15). The requirement of three generations, which Shils imposed to distinguish tradition from fashion, is somewhat arbitrary. Anthropologists Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin (1984) criticise Shils' notion further as being overly restrictive. They suggest that tradition is constantly changing, reconstructed through 'a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them ... a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present through making reference to the past' (Linnekin 1984: 287), thereby highlighting the futility of classifying traditions as genuine or spurious.

Whilst this may be so, focussing on the 'invented' nature of tradition from a historical perspective has yielded a framework for investigating traditions as politically-charged strategies that invoke mythic pasts, used to mobilise a collective consciousness to serve the ideologies of the nation-state. As the various papers in *The Invention of Tradition* show, what are today considered to be hallowed traditions with lineages unquestioningly accepted or popularised as antique are often recent 'inventions' rather than relics of a historical past that continue their innocuous existence into the present.

However, the anthology's underlying definition of tradition as invariant, as opposed to customs in which innovation and change take place (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983: 2-4), reveal the same weakness as Shils' characterisation of tradition. Not only can tradition change, the very emphasis on change (or changelessness) is in itself a Western approach that may not reflect how non-Western societies view their own history (Chakrabarty 1998: 286). Furthermore, as Paul Taylor (1994: 6-7) observes, it is difficult to determine empirically when a change constitutes a loss of tradition and when it is in fact the creative adaptation of a traditional form.

It can be argued that relaxing the criteria for invariance need not undermine the central insight of *The Invention of Tradition*. As Handler and Linnekin explain, the symbolic value of traditions lies in their embodiment of references to the past. Traditions, whether variant or invariant, factual or fabricated, can

serve as a unifying imaginary for a collective identity as long as they exploit the notion of a symbolic precedent. Even inversions of traditions can demarcate a group's self-imposed boundaries. Nicholas Thomas (1992) argues that the manner in which tradition is deployed is contingent on how the representation of difference is shaped by the history of the encounters with others. The contexts in which traditions are created, manipulated, and interpreted can thus be significant to the establishment of markers of identity.

The conceptualisation of traditions as mutable, subject to the vagaries of history, and constantly undergoing transformation unsettles the binary between tradition as fixity and modernity as change. Studies of location specific uses of tradition show how tradition and modernity can, in fact, be constitutive of one another. In this brief review, three examples will suffice to show the different ways in which 'tradition' can be positioned to reinforce contemporary local identities.

Jane Jacobs (2004) argues that the process of modernisation and its concomitant of globalisation can give rise to traditions that may, at the same time, be understood as oppositional to modernity. Rather than overpowering the local, she interprets global processes of de-territorialisation as giving rise to new ways of expressing local traditions. In the context of Aboriginal Australia, Jacobs explains that in seeking to provide for tourists' demands for a romanticised notion of indigenous traditions, visitor centres and hotels have been constructed according to architectural principles that do not reflect the spatial logic of actual dwellings used by Indigenous Australians. She points out that the resulting structures can thus be criticised as inauthentic. However, Jacobs argues that the fact that these buildings were produced in collaboration and consultation with Indigenous communities reveals the processes through which the Indigenous Australians' traditions of custodianship of and their obligations towards the land have been interwoven into modernity.

Barbara Leigh (2002) analyses notions of historicity and tradition as they are employed in creating national symbols and a national identity in contemporary Malaysia where the flow of goods and capital renders national boundaries increasingly irrelevant. Leigh argues that the dual desires for the traditional and the modern find expression in batik and pewter – where their technology, presentation, and the ways in which their production is organised accord with

modern industry, whilst they are concurrently associated in the accompanying rhetoric with tradition and a Malay 'golden age' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She also highlights the dynamic relationship and collaboration between the Malaysian government and its political constituency, and their responses to the demands of a modern marketplace in the promotion of batik and pewter.

Examining migrant Chinese practices in Penang, Jean DeBernardi (2004) shows that traditional rituals which are viewed as inflexible and formalised have also been employed as vehicles for change and the promotion of new symbols and values. The Chinese in Penang have repeatedly drawn on patrilineal descent, ancestor worship, and celebrations of major festivals to mark social boundaries and define their identity. In the late nineteenth century, the secret societies of colonial Penang borrowed traditional Chinese structures of authority to validate new social and political arrangements. Today, contemporary celebrations of Chinese festivals are a focus for unity and a boundary marker of difference. In the 1970s and 1980s for example, the Hungry Ghosts Festival celebration was used to raise funds for 'modernist' community projects such as schools, even though it was viewed ambivalently by the Chinese population, some of whom chose to distance themselves from such 'superstitious' rituals (DeBernardi 2004: 7, 156-181).³ Traditional religious structures have thus been harnessed in the constructions of identity formed under the conditions of modernity and cosmopolitanism. Despite their different contexts, these perspectives emphasise the active processes of legitimation that make use of the links to the past.

Referring specifically to art, Stanley O'Connor (1995) writes,

A tradition in art is never merely a set of transmissible practices but rather a way that consciousness is caught up in things ... If we think of tradition, then, as a process much like the variation and development of a musical theme, capable of transformation, transfiguration, metamorphosis, we see that it is not timeless or exempt from the tensions and contradictions that arise under the conflicting demands of history. In this sense a tradition is what remains close to us, the presence of the past embedded in the lives we actually lead (O'Connor 1995: 4).

Tradition can thus be appreciated as a consciousness of the past that is constantly reformulated in, and of, the present, one that allows room for the changing imaginary of the past. Rather than impairing its function as a reference point

for collective identification, it is precisely the malleability of tradition that provides the scope for individual or collective agency in the construction of contemporary identities.⁴ The referential quality of tradition, rather than its invariance or repetition, serves as the constantly shifting frame on which the imagined past and the lived present are enmeshed in mutual interdependence.

LOSS AND RETRIEVAL:

ANXIETY AND THE PERANAKAN CULTURAL REVIVAL

There has been a widespread perception both within and outside the Peranakan community that Peranakan customs and, by extension, Peranakan culture, are inherently incompatible with modern life. In Felix Chia's (1984) opinion, '[m]odern times and modern ideas, marriages outside the once formidable circle surrounding the Baba community, and the total disregard of customs and traditions, because of one reason or another, are all causing the decline of Baba culture' (Chia 1984: viii).

One Peranakan, Lim Thean Soon, describes his culture as 'elaborate,' 'more suitable for a sedate age,' and 'at variance with modern times' (Pakir 1993: xvi). Tan Boon Hui, a curator at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore, asserts that, '[i]t is quite impossible to live the Peranakan lifestyle in this day and age. The language is dying, and the knowledge of complex customs has been lost through generations' (Wee 2000). Traditional customs such as twelve-day Peranakan wedding celebrations and practices such as beadwork and embroidery are regarded as impracticably time-consuming. Even though T.W. Ong, a former President of the Peranakan Association in Singapore, considers that 'the Baba language [Baba Malay] is much alive today although it is now rather different from what it used to be,' he simultaneously anticipates that '[p]erhaps in one or two generations, the Babas will die out as a recognised sub-ethnic identity within the Chinese race' (Sponsor's Message in Gwee 1993: vii). Prominent scholars like William Skinner (1996: 93) comment on the fading language and culture of the Peranakans, expressing their pessimism or uncertainty about the continued survival of a distinctive Peranakan culture and identity.

Some scholars, however, argue that the perception of Peranakan cultural demise presupposes a static understanding of it (Tan 1993; Rudolph 1998). In particular, Rudolph (1998) observes that the dynamic process of Peranakan cultural change risks being stifled if Peranakans define their culture as that of a specific past. He recommends that Peranakan culture should instead be understood as ‘a changing kaleidoscope of phenomena’ so that the abandonment or modification of traditional practices need not be regarded as cultural decline (Rudolph 1998: 292-294). Independently, and perhaps also in response to this, Peranakans like Lee Liang Hye (2002) stress that ‘[t]he Peranakan is ever changing bit by bit, he is evolving’ (Hye 2002: 13).⁵

Nevertheless, it can be argued that widespread focus on Peranakan cultural decline has, in fact, been a productive step towards managing cultural change. Not only has this stimulated a discussion on cultural loss, but the consequent nostalgia has also helped to revive interest in Peranakan culture. In the past fifteen years, efforts to retrieve and preserve the Peranakan heritage have intensified. The linguist Anne Pakir (1991) succinctly sums this up:

Today, there is the question of the future of Peranakan language and culture. Modernisation and rapid urbanisation, Westernisation and the erosion of identity through intermarriage with non-Peranakans all pose threats to its continued existence. There is a great deal of nostalgia and regret for what is perceived as a beautiful but dying culture and a rich incomparable language. As a result, there has been in recent years – especially in the 1980s – a revival of interest in the Peranakan community and its language (Pakir 1991: 387).

The heightened appreciation of Peranakan culture has stimulated museums to allocate or renovate dedicated spaces for the display of Peranakan material culture, portraying Peranakan decorative art as cultural history and representations of cultural syncretism. The National Museum of Singapore began its collection of Peranakan artefacts in the 1960s to preserve and document Peranakan culture ‘for future generations’ (C.G. Kwa’s preface in Eng-Lee (1989)). In 1991, it remodelled its Peranakan exhibit to typify the interior of an old Peranakan home. In 2008, the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore opened the Peranakan Museum in its Armenian Street premises, dedicated to the display of artefacts and culture of the Peranakan Chinese and other acculturated

communities in island Southeast Asia. The National Library of Singapore, too, launched *A Baba Bibliography* in 2007 (Tan 2007). In Malaysia, the *Warisan Baba* (Baba Heritage or Legacy) exhibition opened at the Muzium Negara in Kuala Lumpur in 1983 (see Othman & Raiha 1986). The Muzium Negara and the Penang State Museum both have permanent displays on Peranakan culture and customs. In 2005, the Muzium Negara also hosted '*The World of the Peranakan Exhibition: Baba and Nyonya Heritage of South East Asia*.'

At the same time, restaurants offer *nonya* cuisine buffets and tourism boards in Singapore and Malaysia promote Peranakan 'heritage trails.' Museum shops concurrently commodify Peranakan culture by selling replica *nonya* ware (polychrome enamel porcelain), while the Singapore Philatelic Bureau launched a surface-textured 'beaded' postage stamp to coincide with the opening of the Peranakan Museum. Media promotion also contributes to a heightened awareness of Peranakan culture. *Ways of the Matriarch* is a television drama where '[t]he viewer learns that one can still lead the traditional Peranakan way of life and still be in tune with the modern way' (MediaCorp n.d.). Interestingly, the underlying themes of the *Ways of the Matriarch*, whose cast includes members of the Singapore Peranakan community, are the intergenerational conflicts and the resolution of the tensions between tradition and modernity.

Alongside these state and commercial undertakings, the Peranakan communities play an active part in preserving and showcasing its culture. They organise cultural events such as beadwork demonstrations and sessions of *cherki* (a type of card game), and support publications on Peranakan customs and decorative arts, legitimising Peranakan culture as heritage and hybrid tradition. The Peranakan Associations in Singapore, Malacca, and Penang, and the Gunong Sayang Association in Singapore organise and support performances of dramas and musicals in Baba Malay.

Whereas such activities may be dismissed as merely nostalgia, significantly, for the Peranakan communities themselves, engaging with loss has encouraged them to address their ongoing relevance:

In dealing with the young generation, we have to come to terms with the fact that hardly any of them come from households in which the Peranakan patois is spoken exclusively and in which Peranakan traditions are observed by all members of the family. Consequently we must be relevant in order to cater to their needs (Lee 1999: 2).

It has motivated the Peranakans to play a key role in valorising their heritage, activating a collective program to preserve Peranakan artefacts and document customs. Peter Wee, scion of an established Peranakan family, set up the Katong Antiques House in 1979, acting as a repository of Peranakan artefacts and a reference point for those interested in culture.⁶ The privately-owned Baba-Nyonya Heritage Museum in Malacca was set up in 1986 by a Peranakan family in whose hands the site has remained for over a century (Chan Kim Sinn, personal communication, 2003).⁷ It coincided with a time when the state was keen to preserve Peranakan culture. The Baba House in Singapore is sponsored by Agnes Tan, daughter of Malacca-born Peranakan statesman Tan Cheng Lock, in collaboration with the National University of Singapore, and is scheduled to open in September 2008.

Annual Peranakan conventions were initiated in 1988 by Khoo Keat Siew, President of the Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang (the Peranakan Association in Penang). Hosted in turn by the various Peranakan Associations, these have focussed on Peranakan history and cultural traditions, with themes such as 'Living Traditions: Celebrating the Peranakan Lifestyle' (Singapore 1999), 'The Peranakan Network: The Malacca and Singapore Connection and the Phuket and Penang Connection' (Penang 2003), and 'Towards the Preservation of Our Heritage' (Malacca 2004). In 2006, the convention was held in Phuket in southern Thailand for the first time, its title – 'Pass on the Chain of Baba Peranakan – To Phuket' – reinforcing the idea of cultural continuity across space and the reach of visible Peranakan heritage. Whilst these conventions might be dismissed as indulgent navel-gazing, it is also necessary to recognise that they facilitate the community's own exchange and recording of information and the reconstitution of once important social networks, bringing together Peranakans from the region. In fact, *Peranakan Networks*, a website run primarily by members of the Peranakan Association in Penang and funded by the Toyota Foundation, was launched in May 2008 with the explicit aim of providing a link between the Peranakan Associations of Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia.

In 1999, the Peranakan Association in Singapore raised S\$17,000 in donations so that the National Archives of Singapore could acquire 180 old photographs of Peranakan life. Some of these photographs were exhibited at the

Asian Civilisations Museum in 2003-2004. Conversely, Peranakans have also made use of state-provided platforms to promote their culture. For instance, Felix Chia's play in Baba Malay, *Pileh Menantu*, was written for the Singapore Festival of Arts in 1984. At a speech given at the opening of the Seventeenth Baba Convention in Malacca in 2004, the Chief Minister of Malacca encouraged collaboration between state institutions and the Persatuan Peranakan Cina Malacca (Peranakan Association of Melaka) to promote Peranakan culture. The retrieval and presentation of Peranakan history and culture must thus be understood as a collaborative and dialogic relationship between the Peranakan community and state institutions.

As Ruth Phillips and Christopher Steiner (1999: 18-19) point out, the interest in preserving 'ethnic art' and the frenzied acts of collecting engendered by the myth of imminent demise can benefit those who are positioned to capitalise on it. Yet the Peranakan community's active participation in retrieving and promoting Peranakan culture cannot be understood simply as naïve efforts at preservation, assuaging nostalgic longings, complicity with state narratives, or even cynical commercialism. It has obliged the Peranakans to confront their assumptions of cultural identity based on external markers and their relationship to cultural change:

[W]hat is our culture today and how are we as Peranakans evolving? ... [I]f we are undergoing a cultural evolution, then are we conscious of the processes of change within and around us? ... How about the other hallmarks of the Peranakan culture like our cuisine, our dress, our porcelains and our architecture? ... Do we see them evolve and manifest themselves in 21st century versions? (Ong 2003: 1).

More pointedly, *Being and Becoming*, a play produced by younger Peranakans, seeks to question the validity of assumptions about Peranakan identity and the relevance of identity markers, as its producer notes:

What constitutes a Peranakan? Is it the ability to speak the patois, cook a hearty dish of buah kelauek [a curry dish], and catch up on gossip over a game of cherki? Or does the essence of this culture go deeper than such mere performative acts? (Lau 2007: 29).

It has encouraged a self-reflexivity and empowered the Peranakans by opening up a space in which their heritage and sense of community can be explored, imagined, and articulated through what Lee Kip Lee (1999), President of the Peranakan Association of Singapore, calls ‘new perspectives on the past’ that ‘blend the old with the new.’ The result has been to re-insert hitherto outmoded practices and artefacts such as *nonya* beading and beadwork into the circuit of heritage and fashion, providing the essential media through which cultural valorisation and transformation can take place.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE PAST: BEADWORK AS HISTORICAL FACT AND ARTEFACT

The public face of Peranakan material culture is overwhelmingly concerned with images of a Peranakan ‘golden age’ from the end of the 1870s to the 1920s. Although some Peranakan families in the Straits Settlements can trace their local ancestry to the first half of the nineteenth century or earlier, material culture descriptions and displays relate mainly to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Presentations of Peranakan material culture tend to highlight sumptuous and elaborate lifestyles, in sharp contrast to displays on bonded maidservants and coolie labour, for instance at the Hua Song Museum in Singapore, which illustrate immigrant Chinese lives and the hardships that new arrivals had to bear.

The Peranakan Museum in Singapore showcases ornately carved and gilded furniture alongside finely wrought silverware, embroideries and ceremonial accoutrements, including a coffin replete with a blue and purple embroidered coffin cover. Intricate beadwork is appropriated as visual support for Peranakan reconstructions of the world epitomised by the ‘Golden Chinese, that charmed circle who lived in Malacca in ducal splendour, cocooned in lush embroideries, ornate wood carvings, gold and yet more gold’ (Oon 1981: 96). Beadwork is used as props for a Peranakan wedding scene at the Muzium Negara in Kuala Lumpur and placed on a Chinese carved and gilded matrimonial bed at the Peranakan Museum. Displays such as these lend credence to narratives of Peranakan material extravagance, at the same time that they romanticise the Peranakan past.

Narratives valorise old pieces of *nonya* beadwork not simply for their 'ornateness of design, brilliant display of colours and finely wrought workmanship' (Ho 1987: 13) but because they were authentically *nonya*, the 'creations of the Nonya's hands and nimble' (Eng-Lee 1989: 15). Peranakans themselves have legitimised and contributed to these accounts. Beadwork teacher Bebe Seet and antiquarians Peter Wee and Michael Cheah, all of whom have Peranakan parentage, emphasise the importance of beadwork as a traditional practice for young *nyonys* of marriageable age. According to Michael Cheah (1990), the *kasut manek* was 'sewn by the Nyonya herself ...[and] worn for the first time on the third day of the wedding' (Cheah 1990: 26). Bebe Seet (1997) notes that learning beadwork was not universally enforced in Peranakan society, but also comments that '[i]t was incumbent on every potential bride to possess the skill to sew and decorate her own pillow and bolster covers, bridal slippers and other ornaments with beads and embroidery' (Seet 1997: 3). Peter Wee remarks that '[t]he nyonya's position in the household was determined by her cooking skills and beading work' and describes beadwork as 'a necessary skill that every well-shod nyonya practised and enjoyed' (Tan & Zuzarte 2004: 5, 57). Cheo Kim Ban (1983), a Malacca Peranakan, writes that the *nonya* of yore 'had to be skilful in working beads on cloth for her own slippers and to embroider many things' (Ban 1983: 16).

The reality surrounding *nonya* beadwork was somewhat more ambiguous. Whereas the *nonya* Queeny Chang conveyed her frustration with needlework and the overwhelming effect it had on her, suggesting her powerlessness to resist customary practice, Gwee Thian Hock's account of his mother's early life described how purchased embroidery could be a practical and acceptable alternative (Chang 1981: 67; Gwee 1985: 50). *Nonya* beadwork was not exclusively made by the Peranakans and some beadwork may have been imported from China (Hector 1995: 24-25; Cheah 2007). Some of these intricacies are acknowledged in more nuanced understandings of historical beadwork. Beadwork from Penang is acknowledged to be more elaborate (Ho 1987: 75). Eng-Lee (1989: 78) shows a set of beaded slipper faces with a shop mark in Chinese characters. More recently, the possibility that some beaded and embroidered articles (including small beaded items) were made on commission by non-Peranakan embroiderers has been highlighted (Ee et al 2008: 56, 61, 101).

Overall, however, the Peranakan community has participated in and supported the construction of a dominant narrative that glamorises the Peranakan past. Yet, in privileging aspects of its material culture, they have also provided a broader framework in which objects can be invested with more particular historical and personal meanings. Because the knowledge of Peranakan culture has until recently been largely undocumented and transmitted orally, institutional representations of Peranakan culture have drawn heavily on the Peranakan community's knowledge of its customs and traditions. Members of the Peranakan community have thus become what Mieke Bal (1999: 5-10) terms 'expository agents,' with authority because of their lived experience, and authenticity because of their ancestry to objectify, codify, and transmit Peranakan culture. Bal uses the term to refer to the analyst of culture, but her elucidation of 'exposing' encompasses the framing and creation of a narrative or narratives of a culture and a past, which is what Peranakan commentators engage in.

The 2008 exhibition *Junk to Jewels* in Singapore curated by a seventh generation Peranakan, Peter Lee, brought together objects sourced from over thirty families with Peranakan ties. The exhibits ranged from jewellery, knighthood medals and furniture to toys, cake moulds and a diary in order to 'juxtapose[e] the ridiculous and the sublime, past and present, the rare and the prosaic' (P. Lee, *Junk to Jewels* exhibition text). In doing so, the exhibition interrogates the definition(s) of Peranakan culture as well as the manifold ways in which Peranakan identity is perceived and shaped by the broader community, museums and collectors, alongside the personal sentiments that these material possessions awaken and sustain for their owners. In *Junk to Jewels*, the privately-owned examples of historical and contemporary *nonya* beadwork are 'exposed' as culturally significant by curatorial selection and their display in the Peranakan Museum which also houses visually spectacular examples of historical *nonya* beadwork.

Whereas Peranakan families may once have disposed of old pieces of beadwork as being out-of-date and of little value, beadwork is now treasured and preserved. Some beadwork is carefully packed with white peppercorns (which some *nonyas* believe will keep moths at bay), wrapped in tissue and stored, while others are encased in glass and hung on walls in Peranakan homes, amplifying their cultural cachet. Noreen

Chan's two beaded clutch bags from the 1930s, one made by her *nonya* grandmother and one by her *nonya* great-grandmother, form 'the heart of a treasured family collection' (N. Chan, *Junk to Jewels* exhibition text). For Heather Ong (2005), a Peranakan in her thirties, while she stresses that '[b]eing a Peranakan is more than just the physical heritage,' she also notes that her family heirlooms are valuable not just for their beauty but for the 'stories behind each piece' (Ong 2005: 4, 8).⁸ It is thus not only that '[s]tories form contexts within which craft objects resonate with meaning' as art historian Sue Rowley (1997: 81) argues, but that the visuality and tactility of *nonya* beadwork also animate the Peranakan communities' perceptions of their past.

As the product of a Peranakan 'golden age,' older pieces of *nonya* beadwork provide the material connection to a past which inspires dignity and encourages self-identification as Peranakan. Indeed, the Peranakan community can, and has, found a source of pride and a point of subjective identification in what Tan Chee Beng (2005) refers to as a 'historical, rediscovered or even reinvented Baba heritage' (Beng 2005: 12-13). Inscribed in contemporary imagination as heritage and authentic tradition, *nonya* beadwork as an historical artefact has become a tangible symbol of a Peranakan's proud ancestry.

HANDMADE: CONTEMPORARY BEADWORK ACTIVITY AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION

Even whilst *nonya* beadwork has come to function as a cultural icon and a signifier of Peranakan heritage, as a contemporary activity, beading has taken on new social roles that replace its traditional significance as part of the training for an eligible young *nonya*. Beadwork projects have been harnessed as a force for social empowerment and change. For instance, Jenny Ling, a Penang-based *nonya*, organised beadwork lessons for single expectant mothers to provide them with a marketable skill, given the current popularity of hand-beaded *nonya* accessories (Ling, personal communication, 2004).

Nonyas and non-Peranakans have taken up beadwork because of their interest in craft whilst some learn it because commercially-made beaded footwear is too expensive, not available, or not to their liking (Tham 2004;

The Beads Have It 2004). At the same time, beadwork lessons and demonstrations have become part of the process through which intangible Peranakan cultural heritage is commodified in search of commercial gains. The Singapore Tourism Board's (2004a) brochure advertises *The Peranakan Experience* with an image of a Western woman receiving instruction in beading a set of rose-motif slipper faces from a *sarong-kebaya* clad *nonya*. The increasing number of classes in *nonya* beadwork in the last five years in Singapore and Malaysia can also be taken as an indication of its newfound popularity as a leisure activity.

Beadwork practice is opportunistically promoted and legitimised as the transmission of heritage art in danger of demise. The Peranakan Association of Penang, in conjunction with the Penang State Government, advertises beadwork and embroidery classes 'to revive Penang's Nyonya crafts' (Living Crafts 1990). Retired nurse, Agnes Tan, offers to teach beadwork to pass on 'a dying art,' even whilst she implies that beadwork is similar to widely practised cross-stitch embroidery (Tham 2004). Helen Chia, a non-Peranakan, remarks, '[t]his is a very unique and important part of Singapore's heritage. By teaching [beadwork]... I am trying to promote awareness of Peranakan culture and revive this dying art' (Chia 2004).

An examination of the beading practices of three women, two of whom are Peranakan, and one who is a Singaporean-born Chinese married to a Penang Peranakan, indicates that it is an interest in the handmade and aesthetic possibilities of the medium which sustains *nonya* beadwork as a contemporary activity. More significantly, however, practising beadwork allows them to connect with or re-discover a Peranakan cultural past, at the same time that it provides a medium for experimentation and contemporary exploration of the Peranakan identity in the present.

Bebe Seet was one of the first to popularise *nonya* beadwork in Singapore. Seet had a keen interest in art and craft as a young girl but did not learn *nonya* beadwork until some ten years ago, when she chanced on a pair of vintage *kasut manek* in a shop window in Malacca. Seet decided to make a pair herself after she had difficulty acquiring one she liked, since the most refined had already become tightly held collectors' items. Her learning process was a combination of intensive lessons over a five-month period from an elderly Peranakan woman and experimentation on her own by studying the techniques on old pieces



Woman's slippers with petit-point bead embroidery.
Embroidered by Bebe Seet, Singapore, c. 1990.
Courtesy of Bebe Seet, Rumah Bebe, Singapore

of beadwork (B. Seet, personal communication, 2003, 2004).

Seet is interested by the visual contradictions in *nonya* beadwork designs, which she explains as the densely packed and often disproportionately-sized motifs that are nevertheless aesthetically pleasing, and the riot of colours which nonetheless maintain a coherent harmony. Her first work was a pair of slippers with a floral motif which she designed herself, inspired by the theme and colours of older beadwork.

Interestingly, even though both her parents were Malacca Peranakans, Seet acknowledges that it was through her interest in *nonya* beadwork and, subsequently, *nonya*

dress that she 're-discovered' her cultural roots and her Peranakan ancestry (B. Seet, personal communication, 2003, 2004).

Conversant also in non-Peranakan beading techniques, Seet now teaches *nonya* beadwork. For her, the handmade nature of beadwork underpins its value as heritage and she emphasises that careful stitching is an important characteristic of *nonya* beadwork. Seet is interested in traditional Peranakan designs, particularly in florals, nurtured through her previous practice of Chinese painting (B. Seet, personal communication, 2003, 2004). Yet, perhaps because she conceives of *nonya* beadwork as traditional handwork rather than as a particular style, she brings her own interpretations of motifs and an individualised aesthetic to bear on her beadwork. Using modern computer software to develop her own beadwork patterns, Seet draws from the multiple influences that are part of her urban reality. Her designs range from adaptations of what she calls Celtic motifs to the Chinese *qilin*

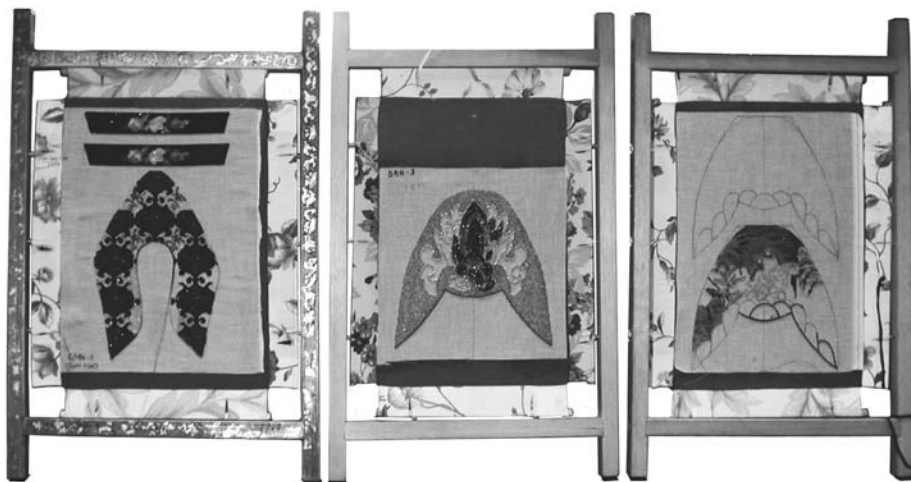
that differs significantly from *nonya* designs. The stylised frontal mask, the restricted palette of browns and gold, and the use of tourmaline beads all depart from conventional Peranakan schema of colourful qilin prancing in profile. Seet has also adapted Walt Disney's depiction of Winnie the Pooh for a beaded teddy bear using Peranakan beading techniques. Although this recalls the *nonya*'s earlier incorporation of Walt Disney characters into their beadwork, the teddy bear was completed in collaboration with a teddy bear maker for a charity raffle sponsored by the Disney Group at the World Dolls and Teddy Bear Show in 1998.

Septuagenarian Oo Leng Choo has been beading for over 60 years. To Oo, the quintessence of *nonya* beadwork is the neatness and perfect alignment of the beads, a reflection of the meticulousness that was demanded of Peranakan handwork in the past. Yet, although she learnt beadwork in a customary Peranakan context from her mother, a Penang *nonya*, Oo's recent beadwork is relatively unorthodox, comprising pictorial works rather than *kasut manek* faces or clutch purses (Oo, personal communication, 2004). These panels were made for her sons and feature traditional Chinese subjects, such as a crane amidst pine trees, and peacocks and peonies. Their emphasis on naturalistic shading and pictorial realism, as well as faithfulness to Chinese models, sets them apart from conventional *nonya* designs of simplified flowers or small birds. In 1990, Oo's work achieved recognition when she won the first prize at the Beadwork Competition and Exhibition organised by the Penang State Chinese Association (Leigh 2000: 33-35).

Oo's style is well represented by her latest work-in-progress, begun in the 1990s. Its design is based on a mural of the eight Daoist immortals that she saw in a relative's home. Her free-hand rendering of the design onto the canvas base is aided by a somewhat faded photograph of the mural and a practised eye. Each time she finishes beading a small area the size of a ten-cent coin (approximately two centimetres in diameter), she stops to 'check' if her picture 'looks real,' unpicking beads if she is dissatisfied (Oo, personal communication, 2004). Completion of this piece has been hampered by the difficulty of obtaining a sufficient supply of slender size fourteen beading needles and lack of a sufficient range of light blue beads for the background. Although the piece is thematically similar to examples of older *nonya* beadwork, its three-dimensional realism and



Eight Immortals of Daoism in petit-point bead embroidery
Embroidered by Oo Leng Choo. Penang, begun c. 1993. Courtesy of Oo Leng Choo, Penang



Panels with petit-point bead embroidery
Embroidered by Bebe Seet. Singapore, 2005. Courtesy of Bebe Seet, Rumah Bebe, Singapore

absence of a cross-stitch template are unusual and mark a re-interpretation and re-working of conventional *nonya* forms and technique.

Regina Wong, for whom beading is a relaxing pastime and a way of maintaining manual dexterity, made her first pair of *nonya* beaded shoes as a gift for her niece's wedding several years ago. Like Bebe Seet, Wong is interested in the ways in which colours are used in *nonya* beadwork and the forms that arise from different interpretations of an original design. Wong has a collection of vintage beadwork given to her by her mother-in-law, a *nonya* from Penang, and she considers finely wrought *nonya* beadwork as a repository of cultural roots and heritage. For her, beading serves as a reminder of shared values in a transient, modern world. Although Wong has since ventured out of *nonya* beadwork, she draws on the forms and interplay of colours in *nonya* beadwork for inspiration in her beaded jewellery, for example, simulating the visual impact of *nonya* beadwork in a multiple-thread net using single-thread netting techniques (R. Wong, personal communication, 2003, 2004).

All three beadworkers highlight the neatness, intricacy, and sophisticated colour combinations of older pieces of *nonya* beadwork, regarding this qualitative element as a distinctive feature of a *nonya* beadwork tradition. Yet, each of them brings different interpretations and markedly different aesthetics to bear on their own pieces of beadwork. Their beadwork has emerged within an identifiable tradition but draws willingly, even if perhaps unconsciously, from without. Tradition thus provides the boundaries that give coherence and stability to their activity of *nonya* beadwork. However, in the absence of any overriding narrative that restricts the definition of contemporary '*nonya*' beadwork, these beadworkers can engage with multiple possibilities. Conceived as heritage and historicised, the tradition associated with *nonya* beadwork acts as a source of inspiration, enabling rather than threatening cultural expression. The continual process of visual transformation represents the creative possibilities for exploring Peranakan culture in the present.

PACKAGING THE PERANAKAN: TRADITION AND HYBRID CHIC

Even as Peranakans seek a nuanced understanding of their ethnicity (see Lee 2008),⁹ popular perspectives of Peranakan culture often emphasize its hybridity, displaying it not just as an example of harmonious intermingling but also as a successfully home-grown culture. Abbreviated for a wider audience, these often gloss over the mixed reactions amongst members of the Peranakan elite to the appropriateness of their cultural orientation at the turn of the twentieth century.

To some extent, state institutions have put the Peranakans' hybridity on display, packaging it as one of un-problematic cultural syncretism. In Malaysia, increasing interest in Peranakan culture through the recent publications and state-supported exhibitions fit with the promotion of racial harmony. The Malaysian National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur showcased the *nonya kebaya* in the collection of Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, wife of the then Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi (Mahmood 2002). In 2005, the Malaysian Department of Museums and Antiquities organised a one-day symposium on Peranakan Heritage, followed by an exhibition of Peranakan material culture, cooking, and beadwork demonstrations and a *nonya* dress fashion show. The press reported that the exhibition was to celebrate not only 'the diversity that characterises the Peranakan culture which is a unique blend of Chinese, Malay, Indian and European influences' but also 'the harmonious multiculturalism of Malaysian society' (Chiew 2005). In Singapore, state officials such as the chief executive officer of the National Heritage Board regard the promotion of Peranakan culture as a way to 'greater understanding and appreciation of the cultural and heritage similarities between different ethnic groups... an essential step in fostering social cohesion and rootedness in Singapore' (Lim 2004: 5).

State endorsements are echoed elsewhere. According to one Peranakan, by the 1990s, the Peranakan identity had become 'unique and prestigious because it is the only ethnic identification [that] link[s] one to the foundation of Singapore. Association with Peranakans is like telling people that my ancestors were the forefathers of Singapore. Moreover, a lot of prominent people in Singapore have Peranakan identity, for example, the senior Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's mother is a Peranakan' (quoted in Aw 1994: 76). Judy Lim, Deputy

Director of the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library in Singapore, observes that '[m]any [Singaporeans and Malaysians] in their search for a new identity [in post-war Malaya] saw in the Babas the unifying racial harmony and cultural singularity they had sought' (Tan 2007: 5).

In addition to a 'rich cultural life, ... sense of pride in [their] heritage and history, and ... identity as a nation,' the promotion of Peranakan culture is also seen as fostering 'significant economic spin-offs, from retail to tourism' as Singapore's Prime Minister recently pointed out (Lee 2008). The Singapore Tourism Board uses the label 'Peranakan' as a branding tool and a drawcard to offer visitors an authentic local experience (Ooi 2003). Stereotypical images of Peranakan beadwork are exoticised for tourist consumption. Juxtaposed on promotional brochures against Indian *sari* materials, gold filigree bangles, Burberry's bags, wafer-thin laptops, and glass-paned shopping malls, an image of *nonya kasut manek* in classic floral and grid designs suggests the co-existence of a dualism – the global and local, timeless tradition and fast-paced modernity – within a single space (Singapore Tourism Board 2004b). At the same time, it implies the consumption possibilities offered by the commodification of hybridity through its objectification as wearable beadwork or decorative home furnishings.

Until the 1980s, the *nonya sarong-kebaya* was seen as traditional dress worn only by an older generation of Peranakan women. Most younger *nonyas* eschewed the *kebaya* in favour of the Chinese *cheongsam* or western dress for formal occasions. Recently, however, it has become chic to wear the *kebaya* (Khor 2000). The *kebaya*, which has been appropriated as 'one of the most recognisable and enduring of Malaysian fashion icons,' trades on its double characteristic as autochthonous ethnic dress and hybrid fashion:

Here and there, one can still see Nyonyas decked out in kebayas and all their finery. Having been part of the Malay Peninsula's history since the 16th century, the Nyonyas and Babas of the Chinese Peranakan communities ... were true multiculturalists from the very beginning. Their knack for combining the best of different cultural influences, from the Chinese, Malay and European, contributed to the rich Peranakan heritage (Mahmood 2002: front flap of dust-jacket).

Studies show that dress choices are contingent on how they may be interpreted. Emma Tarlo (1996: 318-319) argues that clothing demarcates boundaries of identity, separating insiders from outsiders; clothing choice is simultaneously a process of differentiation and identification. She demonstrates, for example, that the popularity of specific ethnic dress such as the colourful, embroidered, open-back bodice and skirt of village Gujarat amongst the elite in India can also be understood as a marker of difference from peasants who are discarding this dress, at the same time that ethnic dress has been appropriated as fashion in the West (Tarlo 1996: 324-326). Ann Marie Leskovich and Carla Jones (2003) demonstrate that the readings of Asian dress in Asia will depend on how the audience perceives the local wearer's position. In their assessment, where the wearer (or local designer) has access to cultural capital and status, ethnic dress is interpreted as fashion savvy, associating the wearer with flows of foreign capital and foreign circulation of ethnic chic. They argue that without this prop, ethnic dress risks being interpreted as unattractive and dated or exotic and traditional.

Nonya dress could be worn variously to forge or signal a sense of community, cultural awareness, exoticism, or even simply because of a fascination with embroidery and batik. But, as the studies above suggest, dress choices are constrained by the context in which they are seen and on the user's subject position. The twin narratives that connect Peranakan culture to a glorious past and endorse indigenous cultural hybridity validate the reclamation of *nonya* dress for its Peranakan wearers as well as for those who wish to signal an affinity with Peranakan culture. Through their social calendars of dinners and dances, conventions, and stagings of Peranakan dramas, the Peranakan Associations provide appropriate contexts that legitimise its dual appeal as hybrid tradition and multi-cultural modernity.

Nonya beadwork exposes detail the Indo-Malay, Chinese, and European influences and dovetail neatly with these narratives. Even whilst it continues as a staple in the visual imaginary of the Peranakan past, setting the tone for period plays, the *kasut manek* has become the 'newest fashion statement in town' (The Beads Have It 2004). Ivan Heng, who played Emily, the middle-aged *nonya* protagonist, in Stella Kon's play *Emily of Emerald Hill* set in 1950s Singapore, wore *kasut manek* with a grid-like design (Lee 2002: 8). Concurrently, Noreen

Chan, a Peranakan in her thirties, states, '[t]here's never been a better time to be a Nonya; suddenly everyone wants a kebaya or some beaded accessory, and I'm actually funky for the very first time in my life' (quoted in Ong 2000: 10).

'Nonya' has become a ubiquitous label for beaded footwear embroidered on a rectangular wooden frame, aimed mainly at a female market. *Nonya* beadwork accessories are enjoying a resurgence in demand, costing between S\$300 to S\$900 for a pair of finely-beaded mules, their labour-intensive nature justifying their appeal as luxury items (Proudly Peranakan 2005). *Kasut manek* designs range from those that bear only an imagined resemblance to *nonya* styles, to others that deliberately draw from older designs. However, commercially available *kasut manek* are dominated by stereotypical imagery of birds, flowers (roses, sometimes a hibiscus, seem to be favourites), small animals, and perhaps the occasional Seven Dwarfs, giving rise to a recognisable *nonya* formula drawn from designs popular in the inter-war years.

Nonya dress, de rigueur at the annual Peranakan convention, is almost inevitably accompanied by the *kasut manek*. Whilst several *nonyas* from Penang differentiate themselves with the use of the *baju panjang* and a crown-like arrangement of their chignon, there appear to be few differences between the types of beaded footwear worn by *nonyas* from Penang, Malacca, and Singapore. Though their *kasut manek* are made with both new and vintage beadwork from the 1950s or before, few contemporary examples of beadwork are decorated with motifs and methods from the late nineteenth century.

The phoenix and the peony, so prevalent on late-nineteenth century *nonya* beadwork, is still a highly symbolic motif for the Peranakans. A television programme produced by Arts Central Singapore in 2002 on Peranakan culture – *On the Trail of the Phoenix*, Edmond Chin's book on Peranakan jewellery – *Gilding the Phoenix*, and the title of the 2005 Peranakan Annual Convention – '*Raising the Phoenix*' all reinforce the symbolism of the phoenix as a representation of the Peranakan culture. The Peranakan Association of Singapore has also chosen the phoenix as its logo. The peony appears on designs of *ang pow* (envelopes for gifts of cash) that the Peranakan Association of Singapore printed for sale. Yet, neither of these motifs appears regularly on contemporary *kasut manek*.



Details of beaded slippers



Angeline Kong and Noreen Chan
at the Seventeenth Baba Convention
Dinner, Malacca, 11 December 2004

Roses, repeated florets, geometric patterns, and birds are the most frequently encountered themes. The triangular-panelled design, initially modified from metallic thread embroidery for beadwork, is another common pattern. The preference for these patterns, all popular between the 1920s and 1940s, appears to be at odds with the nostalgic retrieval of a 'golden age' which is emphasised in Peranakan narratives that legitimise beadwork as heritage and tradition.

The explanation for this limited selection of designs cannot be relegated to technical reasons. Although beadwork on velvet is no longer carried out, the technique of couching on velvet is not unfeasible to master, especially as couching with metallic threads is still done in contemporary embroidery. With the availability of museum displays and publications, visual sources for contemporary beadwork that draw from designs popular before the 1930s are not difficult to access.

Instead, several alternative explanations may be put forward for this phenomenon. One reason is that the designs of roses and peacocks reinforce the emphasis on cultural syncretism that characterise narratives of the Peranakan identity. A second possibility relates to the convergence of regional styles in the inter-war years. The designs of *nonya* beadwork from this period may thus provide a unifying image that connects diverse Peranakan communities in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and southern Thailand, reinforcing the historical bonds that linked them. As Pranee Sakulpipatana, a *nonya* from Phuket, confirms, '[w]e do have the same kind of beadwork shoes and utensils. We learn[t] a lot of Baba culture from our sister Penang because it [took] only [a] one night journey from Phuket to Penang by the Straits Steamship Matang. We bought all what money could [buy] and brought it back... We eat the same food, talk the same language, and share the same belief[s]. We are only geographically divided' (P. Sakulpipatana, personal communication, 2004). Although the Peranakans in southern Thailand may not practise Peranakan beadwork, it nevertheless forms a common element in their cultural consciousness.

The most convincing rationale, however, is related to the personal sentiments associated with selection of particular *kasut manek* designs. As Leigh (2002: 98) argues, individuals may feel a special resonance with items that were used by their grandparents and great-grandparents. In the case of *nonya* beadwork, this is clearly illustrated by two contemporary examples. When stitching a pair of

kasut manek for herself, one *nonya* selected a pattern sewn by her grandmother when the latter was a young girl. As she explains, the choice of pattern is a meaningful way of articulating her lineal ties and grounding her present: 'if you know where you're from, you know where you're at' (N. Chan, personal communication, 2004). Another *nonya* repaired a pair of beaded slipper tops that belonged to her grandaunt and had them made into *kasut manek* for herself (A. Kong, personal communication, 2004). The referential quality of beadwork and respect for a Peranakan aesthetic sensibility is important for both these women. Other *nyonias* have kept beaded slipper faces left to them by their aunts, mothers-in-law, and grandmothers, using these for shoes or as pattern sources that can be translated into dress choices, authenticating their cultural legitimacy. That they can associate these designs with family members whom they know personally may explain the strength of sentiments attached to motifs of the recent past. These ties provide the lineal connections to a more distant age at a time when younger Peranakans are also tracing their extended family trees.

For a community coming to terms with its own vulnerability, lineage can be crucial as a locus that sustains a collective identification. In her study of the Singapore Peranakan identity, Annette Aw (1994: 62-66) associates Peranakan ancestry with local birth, but notes the difficulty in verifying claims of having ancestors that were Straits-born. As the examples above suggests, Peranakan ancestry can be visualised through cultural history to corroborate the claim of a specific past.

The appeal to ancestry does not appear to have become an exclusive criterion for Peranakan identity, particularly since inclusiveness is a strategy to sustain interest in and relevance for Peranakan cultural traditions. For instance, in Malacca, where Tan Chee Beng (1984) argues that kinship networks provide the symbols by which the Peranakans relate to one another and are a crucial framework for the maintenance of a Peranakan identity, membership of the Peranakan Association in Malacca is restricted to Peranakans born in Malacca. By contrast, in Singapore where the Peranakan community has gradually become less visible, the Peranakan Association of Singapore opened its membership to non-Peranakans, 'and would even welcome any contribution to the Peranakan culture' (The Peranakan Association Membership 1993). However, since lineage is an inalienable connection to a Peranakan past and allows identification as

Peranakan without recourse to a static understanding of Peranakan culture, it enables the constitution of a stable reference to Peranakan identity that is independent of contemporary cultural practices. In addition, in societies where multiculturalism is heavily promoted, it facilitates the construction of plural identities as Singaporean or Malaysian *and* Chinese *and* Peranakan.

Hence, for the Peranakans, the value of *nonya* beadwork is its perceptible connection with ‘the generations of lived experience, the intertwined lives of so many individuals’ (N. Chan, quoted in Ong 2000: 10). In this sense, *nonya* beadwork as fashion accessory functions not only as a visual affirmation of cultural relevance and recovery of heritage; more meaningfully, it is a receptacle of personal history, embedded sentiments, a collective tradition, and the celebration of an ancestry that enables sameness and difference. Formularised imagery facilitates the identification of beadwork as ‘*nonya*,’ and the preference for birds, flowers, and geometric designs is suggestive of the extent to which the emphasis on lineage has been internalised in dress choices, disengaging the *kasut manek* both from ephemeral fashion and tourist gimmick. Worn on appropriate occasions, beadwork is a validation of the past as much as it is constitutive of a Peranakan sense of community in the present.

BEADING THE PAST AND PRESENT

Peranakan narratives of cultural history coexist with and inform institutional inscriptions of Peranakan heritage, enabling the Peranakan communities to use state endorsements of cultural harmony to reclaim its cultural relevance and to retain a crucial voice in determining its cultural future. An important part of the Peranakan communities’ efforts to preserve and transmit their heritage has been to make its culture accessible to all, widening their ambit as a more inclusive society. *Nonya* beadwork has a place in their narratives as a material and experiential link that connects the present and the past. As a medium through which Peranakan history may be imagined and articulated, it connects diverse Peranakan communities whose historical trade and kinship networks have now been eroded by political, social, and economic change, and forms the fabric from which the multiplicity of lived Peranakan identities can be explored.

Once a disappearing skill, *nonya* beadwork is now cherished as part of a Peranakan heritage to be preserved and passed on. As historical artefact that has survived into the present, vintage beadwork represents a material connection with history, providing the visual imaginary for a shared Peranakan past. As contemporary activity, it is a traditional medium for eclectic experimentation and cultural transformations, a springboard to new perspectives of Peranakan culture in the present. As a dress accessory, contemporary beadwork provides a sensory experience of a world gone by. *Nonya* beadwork can be consumed by the non-Peranakan as a fashion accessory. At the same time, for the Peranakan, beadwork can be an expression of personal histories and lineal ties that legitimise a Peranakan identity which is not only fluid but, in reality, plural and heterogenous.

Conceived of as tradition, cultural knowledge can be exposed, disembodied, codified, and archived, becoming an open resource for Peranakans to draw on as they re-create their memories and narratives. Far from being prescriptive and restrictive, interpreting Peranakan culture as tradition co-exists with individual and collective explorations of Peranakan identities. Remembered as lineage, the presence of the past provides stability and defines difference, providing the core of an inalienable Peranakan consciousness. Imagined as cultural borrowings, the dynamic process of Peranakan cultural transformation is given renewed vibrancy and relevance. Translated into tradition, this momentary fixity of '*Peranakan culture*,' made manifest in material culture, can be liberating, serving as a common chord that harmonises polyphonic and ever-changing Peranakan identities.

ENDNOTES

1. The term 'Peranakan' has acquired both ethnic and cultural connotations. In Malay, *Peranakan* means 'locally-born' and, strictly-speaking, Peranakan can refer to descendants of indigenous women and Chinese, Indian Muslim (Jawi Peranakan), Arab, and Jewish men born in the Malay-speaking world. Here, as I will be discussing only the Peranakan Chinese, the term Peranakan will be used exclusively to refer to them. Because cultural markers have become an important descriptor, mixed ethnicity is not a necessary criterion of identification as Peranakan.
2. Kwok Kian Woon (2004) makes the distinction between preserving and conserving, preferring the latter term to represent a living heritage. However, I have chosen to retain the term 'preserve' in line with the dominant terminology used by the Peranakan Associations in Singapore, Malacca, and Penang.
3. DeBernardi explains that the organisers of the celebration in fact focussed on the cultural (for example, through music and martial arts performances) rather than the ritual aspects associated with such events.
4. This echoes Maurice Halbwachs (1941/1992) who argued that cultural memory is constructed to serve present social needs. Barry Schwartz (1982) draws from Halbwachs and stresses that cultural memory may be dictated in part by the present but is also constrained by the historical reality of the past, providing a more nuanced understanding of cultural memory.
5. How far Lee's statement was precipitated by academic literature is uncertain, but it is interesting to note that Lee (1999) published a favourable review of Rudolph's *Reconstructing Identities*.
6. Peter Wee's maternal grandfather is Tan Cheng Kee. Tan Cheng Kee was the brother of Mrs Lee Choon Guan and the son of Tan Keong Saik, a prominent Malacca Peranakan. Tan Cheng Kee and Tan Cheng Lock were cousins; their grandfather, Tan Choon Bock, founded the Straits Steamship Company together with Tan Beng Swee (son of Tan Kim Seng). See Lee (2001).
7. The idea of a heritage house was sparked by the historic homes that Chan Kim Lay visited in 1983, when he was in the United Kingdom to attend his daughter's graduation ceremony (Chan 2002). Chan stresses the continuity of tradition through the performance of ancestral rites at this house.
8. Barbara Leigh (2000) notes the importance of personal stories attached to material artefacts that 'provide a window to the emotions: cultural and individual, that are attached to certain crafts' (Leigh 2000: 36), and it might be added, the products of those crafts.
9. Lee's (2008) article on Peranakan 'roots' opens with the statement that '[p]erhaps nothing is more misunderstood about the Peranakans than their ethnic origins' (Lee 2008: 3) and goes on to explain that Chinese ethnicity is the primary characteristic.

10. Compare, for instance, the geometric motifs derived perhaps from Eastern European designs with the rose and *anak-anak* designs, illustrated in Tham (2004: 11) and Emmanuel (2005).
11. The feedback at a forum entitled 'Reviewing the Peranakan Identity,' organised by the Peranakan Association of Singapore in 2002 is also revealing (see Tan 2003). Some participants proposed personal qualities such as a sense of graciousness, tolerance, adaptability, and a shift to a more inclusive definition of Peranakan based on 'a sensed affinity for the community and its cultural values' (Tan 2003: 7). Whilst participants were most likely those with an interest in the survival of a unique Peranakan community and the conclusions of the forum may be biased, its results are nevertheless interesting.

GLOSSARY

<i>cherki</i>	A card game played by the Peranakan Chinese.
<i>sarong</i>	Tubular skirt tied at the waist.
<i>baju panjang</i>	Long blouse with a full-length opening at the front, fastened with brooches.
<i>kebaya</i>	Hip-length blouse with a full-length opening at the front, fastened with brooches.
<i>kasut manek</i>	Beaded slippers.
<i>qilin</i>	Chinese mythical beast – a composite creature with a horn, whose appearance is often likened to a unicorn; an auspicious symbol.

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EVERYBODY WAS
KUNG-FU FIGHTING
THE LION DANCE AND CHINESE
NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE
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EVERYBODY WAS KUNG-FU FIGHTING THE LION DANCE AND CHINESE NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Heleanor B Feltham

... At the heart ... was the conviction that the things humankind makes and uses at any particular time and place are probably the truest representations we have of values and meaning within a society. The study of things, material culture, is thus capable of piercing interdisciplinary boundaries and bringing forward meaningful discussions and interactions among scholars in many disparate fields (Kingery 1996).

In the 1990s, shortly before Hong Kong was returned to China, the Hong Kong film director, Tsui Hark, made a series of three films set in the late nineteenth century, *Once Upon a Time in China I, II & III*. The first of these films opens aboard a Chinese junk, The General of the Black Flag Army and his advisor are ensuring an auspicious journey with a lion dance. The dance is vigorous, joyous, making use of the junk's rigging like a tightrope, and accompanied by the loud reports of fireworks. It attracts the attention of a European ship in the harbour, whose sailors react to the noise by firing on the Chinese ship, shooting the lion-dancer. As he falls, the lion's head parabolises through the air, to be caught by the movie's hero, Wong Fei Hung, who defiantly completes the dance. The sequence is followed by an image of an army of Chinese martial artists, training at dawn on a beach (Tsui Hark 1991). Both the hero and the general were actual historical characters, involved in both the martial arts and

the revolutionary movements of late nineteenth century China. The opening lion dance within the context of the film is both a referencing of tradition and an act of defiance.

The lion dance, as an object of material culture, incorporates both the physicality of the costumes and the performance, and the mythologies, cultural and social significance and deeper resonances which underlie and sustain the dance as event.

Material culture is just what it says it is – namely, the manifestation of culture through material productions. And the study of material culture is the study of material to understand culture, to discover the beliefs – the values, ideas, attitudes, the underlying premise is that human-made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged. Material culture is thus an object-based branch of cultural anthropology or cultural history. Jules David Prowne (Lubar, Steven & Kingery 1993).

In this essay I will explore the origins of the lion dance, its connection to the South Coast Chinese diaspora of the mid 1800s and its relevance to contemporary expatriate Chinese communities. I will look at the connection between lion dance/martial arts societies, revolutionary movements and sojourner culture, arguing that the performance became a significant marker of overseas Chinese identity in the late 1800s and early 1900s, leading to its continuing popularity and international acceptance as both sport and tradition in the current age. My focus will be less on the costume and performance, than on the integration of myth, praxis and spectacle as aspects of cultural nostalgia and identity.

This essay comes out of a much longer and more complex consideration of lion imagery that formed the basis of my doctoral dissertation (Feltham 2007) and is based on structural analysis of material culture as proposed by Susan Pearce in her monograph *Researching Material Culture* (Pearce 2000). Pearce advocates a number of approaches to the analysis of objects including the production of ideology through spectacle the transformation of nature into material culture and the apprehension of reality through sensory perception (Ibid.) She advocates an analysis of the narrative of material culture, positioning the object/performance/event within an ideological critique of the mechanisms



Pak Hong Kung Fu Society lion at the Powerhouse Museum
Photograph: Heleanor Feltham, Chinese New Year 1998



Manjusri on a lion. Fresco, Bezeklik, Xinjiang, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
Photograph: H Feltham 2006

of power and dominance, a critique which embraces a range of over-arching issues e.g. colonisation, gender, Queer theory, class, identity ... (Ibid.)

ORIGINS OF THE CHINESE LION DANCE

Skilled dancers from Xiliang,
Persian masks and lion masks.
The heads are carved of wood,
The tails are woven with thread.
Pupils are flecked with gold
And teeth capped with silver.
They wave fur costumes
And flap their ears
As if from across the drifting sands
Ten thousand miles away.
Bo Juyi C9th (Hayashi, 1975)

Between the sixth century BC and the first AD, lion iconography travelled eastward along the Silk Roads, reaching China by the Eastern Han period (25-221 AD), a time which also saw the first live lions presented to the Chinese Emperor by Central Asian ambassadors (recorded by Fan Ye C5th CE in the chapter on the Western Regions of the Hou Hanshou). They had already become popular as guardian figures, though the majority of artists had to rely on imagination, imported images and written and oral descriptions to create guardian lions for tombs of emperors, princes and members of the nobility such as the stone lions guarding the Ancestral Shrine of the Wu family in Jiaxiang County, Shandong Provinces. Smaller desk-top lions for scholars and belt buckles for the nobility such as the Eastern Han gold belt buckle (25-220 AD) with winged lion (Talbot-Rice 1965) reflected the description in the twelfth century collection of prehistoric to Tang dynasty poems, the Yuefu Shiji ‘Small was the golden lion on his girdle, fiercely glaring the unicorn embroidered on his garment’. However there appears to be little direct evidence to support the claim, popular with contemporary martial arts groups, that the lion dance was introduced into China during this period. However Wolfgang Behr, in his study of the linguistic roots of ‘lion’ in China (Behr 2004) cites a reference in the Hanshu Treatise on Etiquette and Music to ‘animal imitators’ a term explained

by the Three Kingdoms scholar Meng Kang (fl c. 250 AD) as like those dancers who act as frogs, fish or lions today (Behr 2004).

There is certainly evidence for western gifts to Han emperors of live lions, and a plethora of lion imagery, including the larger-than-life-sized Spirit Road guardians, which first appear at this time (Akiyama 1968) but no concrete evidence of the dance in China appears until the Tang dynasty (618-906) when the noted poet Bo Juyi (772-846) wrote his description of the lion dancers of Xiliang (Hayashi 1975). By this period, China had re-emerged as a united and powerful empire, once again moving to incorporate the Xinjiang region of Central Asia within its hegemony and the lion and indeed the lion dance had become old and familiar symbols, incorporated into the Chinese view of the world along with the dragon and the phoenix (Feltham 2007).

By the eighth century the lion dance had already reached as far as Japan. Formal diplomatic contacts with China, which had developed during the Sui Dynasty (581-618) under the aegis of the Japanese Prince Shotoku (574-622 AD) and continued through the Tang Dynasty, brought many elements of Chinese culture to the Japanese court including Mahayana Buddhism with its established iconography of paired guardian lions. Chinese-style Buddhist temple complexes were built, especially in the eighth century capital, Nara complete with gate and door lions, *Gandhara*-style Buddhist statues. The lion dance, which had become associated with celebrations of Buddha's birthday, was regularly performed (Hyashi 1975). The oldest known lion mask (*shishi-gashira*), a pawlonia wood *Gigaku* dance head with an articulated lower jaw, is to be found in the Nara National Museum (available on its website) with the many Silk Road treasures of the Emperor Shomu (701-756) who gifted his collection to Nara's Buddhist Todaji temple on his death. The lion had travelled to its furthestmost Eastern realm.



Lions of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, George Street Haymarket, Sydney
Photograph: H Feltham 2004

THE LION AS PROTECTOR OF LIMINAL SPACES, TIMES AND SPACES OF TRANSITION

For the religious man the supernatural is indissolubly connected with the natural, that nature always expresses something that transcends it ... a sacred stone is venerated because it is sacred, not because it is a stone; it is the sacrality manifested through the mode of being of the stone that reveals its true essence ... it is “supernature” that the religious man apprehends through the natural aspects of the world (Mircea Eliade 1959).

Wherever they are found, lion images can be seen in pairs, guarding gateways, bridges, temples, law-courts, universities, banks, palaces, funerary monuments – any space which can be considered as marking a zone of transition (Feltham 2007) and this rapidly became as true for China as for Western Asia and Europe. Over the ensuing centuries following their introduction in the Han dynasty, lions came to play an increasingly important role in Chinese arts. Initially associated with imperial power, and found guarding significant buildings such as palaces and temples, they soon became available to a wider social range (Hu 1995). The earliest common representation for most ordinary Chinese was a stylised lion’s head on a soldier’s shield. Soon they could be found outside rural temples and at the gateways of country estates. Seen as a divine and mysterious animal, a protective power, the lion became a standard image of folk artists, developing different forms in response to local materials and culture. In rural villages the entrance to the community was often protected by a single, male *shishiye* (stone lion lord) standing on a pedestal, while smaller, usually ceramic lions *fengshiye* (wind lion lord) were placed on rooftops to protect the house and correct any inadvertently wrong feng shui. *Shishigong* (stone lion masters) were a feature of countryside shrines, designed to protect against natural calamities and ensure seasonal rain and bountiful harvests (Hu 1995).

At the same time the lion dance was evolving into a popular ritual associated with seasonal events such as the New Year, partially losing its Buddhist connection, and with major communal events such as the opening of a new family temple or an intervillage wedding. It had acquired strikingly different northern and southern forms. The northern lion dance is undoubtedly the older; usually performed by two or more lions, the head and the body costume

are furry and rather more realistic than the southern version and the leggings are one with the body. Tradition ascribes the northern dance to the Northern Wei (386-533 AD) period, when a performer of the Hu ethnic group brought to the court a dance which used a wooden lion's head mask. The dance was eventually performed for the Emperor, who proclaimed it the Northern Wei Auspicious Lion (Philippines Ling Martial Arts Assn website 2004). By the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) it is referred to simply as the Northern lion. According to the Chinese Cultural Resource Centre website (2004) a variant on the legend, attributing it to the same period, tells of the Emperor's invasion of the Hu homelands, and capture of the Hu army. At a celebratory banquet, he ordered his prisoners to provide him with entertainment. Thirty of the soldiers, experienced lion dancers wearing wooden masks, paraded before him showing their acrobatic and mimetic skills, to such good effect that the Emperor freed the soldiers and settled them throughout his kingdom. These two legends reinforce both the Central Asian origin of the lion dance, and the period of disunion in the 4th-7th which saw the establishment of the Dunhuang Buddhist caves and the popularization of Buddhism in China (Feltham 2007). Most Lion Dance/Martial Arts websites around the world claim, without specific references, that the rhythmic drum music of the northern lion dance, the Tai Pin Melody, dates to the Later Zhou (Five Dynasties) period 951-960.

Southern lions are decidedly louder, more acrobatic and dynamic than their northern counterparts. Southern lions more frequently perform solo, have far more spectacular moves, and have an elaborately painted head of papier maché and bamboo, weighing as much as 20 kilos, attached with red ribbon to a brightly coloured long piece of material that represents the body. The two dancers may also wear matching leggings, but body and legs are always separate, allowing frequent and necessary changeover dancers. The degree of exertion necessary to perform a good lion dance, particularly a competitive, acrobatic one, is considerable, and a good lion dancer, by definition also a good martial artist, could achieve a high degree of public recognition, especially if he moved from village to urban levels of competition.

There is possibly some influence of Southeast Asian dances on both the form and the percussion accompaniment of these lions. One of the many origin myths cited by several websites, including the Yi Dao Dragon & Lion Dance

Troupe (2004) seems to be based on the Indonesian singa barong story. In this version, set in the Southern Song period (420-279 AD) the general Zhong Yue lead an army south into the country of Lin Yi on the Laos/Burma border. The king of the country used a line of elephants to stop the attack, but the general responded with a line-up of lions, which panicked the elephants, giving the victory to the Chinese who celebrated with a dance of warriors wearing lion costumes.

POPULAR LION MYTHS

Artefacts are tools as well as signals, signs, and symbols. Their use and functions are multiple and intertwined. Much of their meaning is subliminal and unconscious. Some authors have talked about reading objects as texts, but objects must also be read as myths and as poetry (Kingery 1996).

By the nineteenth century a number of different stories and conventions had evolved, and the lion dance had become an important part of both urban and village culture in the coastal cities and provinces of southern China (Hu 1995; Hayes 1998). It is largely these stories that were retained (and possibly embroidered) by émigré Chinese martial arts practitioners from these regions that underpin ‘traditional’ international lion dancing today.

A fairly typical description of one contemporary/traditional form of the dance comes from the Ann Arbour, Michigan martial arts Studio (2004): In a cave-shrine, behind the closed doors, lies a sleeping lion. A fat Buddhist monk enters, glances around, lights a lantern opens the doors and sweeps out the dust and leaves, lights the candles and incense burners, then wakes the lion with drums and gongs. They play together, but when the monk tries to entice the lion to pray at the altar, he becomes bored with the game and bites the monk. The monk then teases the lion with some greens, sometimes dangling them out of reach, until the lion grabs them in his mouth, scattering the shreds three times onto the audience to bless them with wealth and good fortune.

According to their web-site, one of the best-presented of literally hundreds,

The lion supposedly possesses mystical properties: When paired with the five colours (yellow, black, green, red and white) as the costume is coloured, it is said to have control over the five cardinal directions. The costume is composed of many symbolic shapes. The bird shaped horn represents the phoenix. The ears and tail are of the unicorn. The protruding forehead, adorned with a mirror which deflects evil forces, and the long beard are characteristic of Asian dragons. The lion walks back and forth, in a zigzag path, in order to confuse evil spirits, which the Chinese believe move in straight lines. Finally, the act of eating and dispersing of the greens symbolizes the distribution of wealth and good fortune to all those present. These symbols combine to cure sickness, bless marriages and guard against misfortune.

The southern style Lion Dance has become an extension of the Chinese Martial spirit, and is always performed by students of Kung Fu... The early martial artists, studying in Buddhist temples, imitated the fighting styles of the animals in nature that they observed... The forms you see imitate the movements and characteristics of these animals. The lion dance is an extension of the Chinese martial arts and is always performed by martial artists. All the movements of the Lion are based on stances and positions from the Kung Fu taught at AMAS. Lion dancing develops strength, flexibility and endurance as well as the ability to work in teams and overcome obstacles through group effort. Not only do the performers display strength, coordination, agility and endurance, they also exemplify the martial spirit in the 'Ssu-wei', or the four basic supports of a State: 'li,' or decorum; 'i,' uprightness of mind (morality); 'lien,' honesty; and 'chih,' a sense of honor (<http://a2amas.com/liondance/> Accessed 20 August 2004).

This outline neatly combines Buddhist and Daoist elements, with the lion and the dancers also projecting the ideal qualities of a Confucian gentleman. There is an emphasis on good fortune and seasonal fertility, and their dance contains a number of traditional aspects as well as some less usual (the lion does not often bite the monk!).

Many versions of the lion dance dispense with the monk or 'happy Buddha' altogether or reduce him to an intermediary between the community and the lion. These scenarios seem to originate principally in Guandong Province and follow one of three frequently cited origin legends: In the first, the people of a Southern village were plagued by the annual appearance of a monster, the Nien, who attacked their fields and destroyed their crops. Unable to deal with

the monster, the village called on the help of the divine lion, an embodiment of greatness, courage and longevity, who proceeded to drive the Nien away. Unfortunately the Nien returned the following year, and the lion, busy with his celestial guardian duties, was unable to help, so the villagers created a lion costume, from fur, cloth, paper, bamboo and paint and accompanied by drums and cymbals to sound the lion's roar, they zigzagged towards the Nien, scaring it away as the lion had done. Re-performed every year, the action became the wusuishi, the lion dance. (This version can be found on martial arts websites from countries as diverse as Holland, Malaysia, Australia, the United States, the Philippines and Singapore).

The kindness of the lion, and its Buddhist associations, is also stressed in the myth of Guanyin and the Lion King. Set in the Beijing-operatic world of the Chinese Gods, it tells of the Lion King, a carefree and often irresponsible divinity with a lot in common with Monkey, who decided in a moment of madness to play a practical joke on the Jade Emperor, ruler of the gods. This did not go down well with the Jade Emperor, and he promptly chopped off the Lion King's head. However the Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin, feeling sorry for the poor lion, tied it back on again with a colourful silk ribbon and brought him back to life. The Lion was so grateful, that he promised to play no more practical jokes and to spend his time helping others. Impressed by this, Guanyin gave him a horn to fight evil, and a reflective nose to scare away demons, and taught him the dance which drives off evil and brings good fortune, a dance which has been performed by martial artists ever since (Winglam Kungfu, California 2004). This particular story resonates with the experiences of rebellious Chinese teenagers, who are often sent by their parents to the local martial arts academy to learn respect, discipline and concern for others, along with the lion dance (Personal communication with Peter Kuo, the sifu of the Pak Hong Kung Fu Society, Sydney who came to Australia from Shanghai as a young man).

A third, very different story, with several variations, ascribes the beginning of the lion dance to a dream meeting between the Emperor and a lion. In one version the Emperor, sometimes identified with Han Wu Di (175-87 BC) who established the Silk Road, is separated from his army. Lost, alone and hungry, according to the Yi Dao Dragon and Lion Dance Group (2004) he meets with a lion who escorts him back to the palace. Describing his dream

next day to his ministers, he is told that the animal is a lion, symbol of the West, and that his expansion westward will bring good fortune to China. The dance commemorates this event. This appears to be a lion-dance version of the 'Dream of the golden man' legend when another Han emperor had a vision of the Buddha. Another version of the 'Emperor's Dream' has the Qing emperor, Qianlong (1735-96 AD) travelling South and dreaming of a magical rainbow creature coming to greet him. Returning to Beijing, he ordered his craftsmen to recreate the beast, which was then brought out at every festival to dance in hopes of peace, prosperity and good fortune. All of these legends position the lion as benevolent, exotic in origin, and associated with moments of transformation, religious or military. Both the legends and the dances became associated with popular culture, and with martial arts schools, particularly in the coastal cities and villages of south China.



Male and female lions at the entrance to the Chinese Garden, Darling Harbour, Sydney
Photograph: H Feltham 2006

MARTIAL ARTS, REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS AND THE LION DANCE

When the dancing lion enters a village or township, it is supposed to pay its respects first at the local Buddhist temple, then to the ancestors at the ancestral hall, and finally through the streets to bring happiness to all the people (Lion Dance The Free Dictionary website 2005).

However in many of the nineteenth century Southern lion-dances there is a hidden agenda. The qing (green vegetable) which the lion must often hunt down assiduously, and which is ripped to pieces before being scattered over the crowd, also represents the much-hated Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the ruling Manchu against whom so many Southern-based rebellions took place (both on-line lion dance websites and personal communication with Professor Chongyi Feng and Dr Yinglie Guo). The green also, of course, represents good crops, and therefore good fortune. Today among American lion dancers, (Chinese Historical and Cultural Project website 2004) the ‘green’ has come to represent ‘greenbacks’ (US dollars) with all the essential connotations of good luck.

Wherever the lion dance is performed, it is also usual to find paired Chinese lions, often, as in Sydney or San Francisco, positioned at either end of a major Chinatown thoroughfare or guarding the entrances to local temples, banks, clubs and restaurants. Lions guarding liminal spaces and transition zones are virtually universal (Feltham 2007), but to correctly position both the paired entrance lions and the lion dance in nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese life, it is necessary to have a broad understanding of the political history of the period and of village society in Southern China.

Lion dance teams were at the heart of the traditional Cantonese-speaking villages of Southern China; Dr. James Hayes, who was from the 1950s until his retirement a member of the British Civil Service in Hong Kong, responsible for village re-locations, had the opportunity to talk with elders who recalled the old lion dance traditions:

The teams performed at the opening of temples, ancestral halls, schools, village offices or the completion of a new house, as well as playing an essential role in major festivals and greeting important visitors. When a bride transferred

to her husband's village, her local lions would accompany her, to be met by his lion team, and later the lions would celebrate the joyful birth of the first son. They carried out other important functions, too. If disease threatened the village, the dancers were sent with the Daoist priests in a procession around the neighbourhood to frighten it away, and should the village be under threat of attack, a common enough event in the lawless years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the lion dancers, under their martial arts instructors, would form the first line of defence.

Training was more than simply martial arts and dance steps. Flawless cooperation was essential when the exhausting dance was in progress, with the young men taking turns to manage the stifling and heavy mask while the drums and gongs pounded. And without rigid rules, an encounter between two lions, especially in the competition season, would result in an inter-village battle. Training emphasised that the Confucian virtues of loyalty, decorum, self-discipline and respect for teachers and elders were as important as skill in performance (Hayes 1998).

Lion dancing was closely associated with the martial arts, and the martial arts academies in turn were associated with revolutionary, often religious movements. Southern China had a long tradition of independence and occasional revolt. It was the last area of China to come under Manchu rule in the 1680s, and had been a refuge for exiled Ming supporters. During the Qing Dynasty a number of revolutionary societies evolved, along the lines of previous peasant revolutionary associations, many of them using the term Hong ('brave/red'). Revolutionary cults often combined martial arts training with varieties of religious passion, the White Lotus rebellion of 1796-1804, for instance, was spearheaded by a fervently Buddhist organization that proclaimed the immanent return of Buddha and the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. During the stresses of the nineteenth century such groups fed into major movements such as the Taiping Uprising (1851-64), the Red Turbans revolt (1854-55) and the Boxers in 1900 (Huston 2004).

The hero of the three Tsui Hark kung fu movies, *Once Upon a Time in China I, II and III*, set in late nineteenth century South China, is a martial arts exponent who represents a Chinese ideal in an age of foreign intervention and political collapse. But the Jet Li character, despite the elements of heroic fantasy and choreographic violence, is based on an actual lion dancer of the period. Wong Fei Hung (1850-1933) was born in Xiqiao village in Guangzhou in 1850, the descendant of a long line of martial artists. Starting as street performers,

he and his father eventually established a martial arts academy. Wong at eighteen was already both the martial arts combat instructor for the fifth regiment of the Canton army, and a key member of a community-based protection organization, the Canton Militia. Like many other groups, Wong's academy produced its fair share of revolutionaries, most of whom followed Sun Yat Sen, the provincial president of the Republic of China. Wong himself, after successfully passing the government examinations that would give him the status of a senior army officer and being posted to Fujian, was associated with the unsuccessful attempt to establish an independent republic there. Fujian would later become the scene of a major uprising in 1933, the year of Wong's death (Hung Kuen Net 2008).

A brilliant lion dancer, charismatic, cool and revolutionary, Wong would become the hero of 109 martial arts films and TV series. For a new generation, awaiting the return of Hong Kong to China, the Lion Dance would again symbolise the hopes, strength, courage and endurance of the Chinese people. And the link between temple, *Tong* and martial arts would ensure that the Chinese lion, as both paired guardian statues and as celebratory dance, would effectively outrank the dragon as a symbol of Chinese ethnicity travelling with the sojourners across the globe.

Southern villages were often centres for local branches of the Hong societies, and martial arts training was a way of life, not only as a potential precursor to revolt, but simply as a means of defence against wandering bands of bandits, defeated rebels, and other human disasters. It was from these villages, with a tradition of defensive martial arts combined with highly competitive lion dancing that generations of young men made their way to the goldfields of Australia and the Americas and the opening markets and tin mines of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

China, following the death of the Qianlong Emperor in 1795, was particularly vulnerable to European exploitation. By the 1790s Europe's unofficial trade with the coastal ports of south China was expanding rapidly, and foreign merchants, whose balance of payments was upset by the unequal demands of the China trade, were desperate to find a commodity that would counterbalance the tea, silks and porcelains they purchased from the Chinese. They found it in opium. The Chinese government, not surprisingly, banned its import in 1800, but a flourishing trade in the illicit drug continued, successfully redressing the balance of payments.

In 1839 an unusually upright local governor of Canton seized stocks of opium from the British hong and burned it by the waterfront. British merchants, scandalized by this interference in legitimate trade, complained to their government – who were still feeling disgruntled by the failure of both the Macartney (1793) and the Amherst (1816) missions to Peking and a war began. In 1842 the conflict was finally resolved, and Britain under the Treaty of Nanking not only gained free access to Hong Kong, Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai, but claimed an indemnity of 21 million pounds from the Chinese government. The costs of the indemnity, the loss of income from opening the ports, and the need to restore areas ruined by war forced the Manchu government to increase the taxes on an already overburdened Chinese peasantry. If increased taxation were not enough, the 1840s and 50s were also a period of unusually bad seasons. China's population survived on intensive and maximal agriculture, bad seasons inevitably meant famine – and also implied that the current Emperor had lost the Mandate of Heaven. Confucian beliefs hold that the Emperor is appointed by Tien (Heaven) to administer China on behalf of the divine. His role is seen as similar in power and responsibility, on a national scale, to the head of an extended Chinese family, and he is also responsible for performing the various seasonal and other rituals that ensure fertility, good harvests, peace and prosperity. Natural disasters, such as floods, famines and earthquakes, and unsuccessful wars, are indications that the current Emperor and his dynasty have lost the confidence of Heaven, and that the time is ripe for their overthrow. Obviously a revolution can only succeed if the leader has been granted the mandate, his success is irrefutable proof.

In 1847 alone there were 26 popular uprisings. (Chinese-Australian Historical Society Conference 2002). During this time the first Protestant missionaries appeared in China and began a vigorous campaign of Christianising the heathen, helped by the first English/Chinese dictionary and the first translations of the Bible into Chinese. The Christian aspects of the bizarre Taiping Uprising of 1850-1864, led by a failed scholar who claimed to be Jesus Christ's younger brother, ensured that missionaries would become exceedingly unpopular in much of southern China and since Guangzhou was also the area most frequently in contact with western merchants and missionaries, a strand of anti-European passion was added to the anti-Ming fervour (Spence 1996). Later revolutionaries would see everything western, especially religion, as an evil.

The scandalous conduct of Christians and barbarians is irritating our Gods and Geniuses, hence many of the scourges we are now suffering ... the iron roads and iron carriages are disturbing the terrestrial dragon and are destroying the earth's beneficial influences. The red liquid which keeps dripping from the iron snake (rusty water from the oxidated telegraph wires) is nothing but the blood of the outraged spirits of the air ... The missionaries extract the eyes, marrow and heart of the dead in order to make medicaments ... As for the children received in orphanages, they are killed ... (Te-ling 1926 cited in Warner 1974).

The Qianlong emperor's personal grasp of Chinese affairs had faltered during his old age, and many of the policies he upheld, imperial control of key aspects of government, jobs for the (Manchu) boys, increasing ossification of the Confucian examination system, and a rejection of Western overtures, caused intense civil unrest among both the Chinese and the minority populations. Throughout the nineteenth century secret societies and revolutionary groups, often with an overt religious focus, flourished, occasionally breaking into open revolt (Spence 1996). To give some insight into the devastation arising from the conflicts, much of it over the ownership of arable land, in one month of 1856, over 3000 people died in Toishan alone (Golden Dragon Museum website 2004), a key area of Guangdong Province and the source of much migration to Australia.

During the time of the Taiping, a second opium war broke out. Canton (Guangzhou) was seized by Anglo-French forces in 1857, and in 1858 a second treaty, the Treaty of Tientsin was signed between China and a Western bloc of Great Britain, France, the USA and Russia opening more ports to trade and legalising the importation of opium. When in 1860 the Imperial court refused to accept European diplomats, an Anglo-French army marched to Peking and burned the Summer Palace.

The indemnities and social disruption caused by the Opium Wars, the Taiping Uprising and other rebellions and the resultant periods of dislocation and economic collapse encouraged Chinese village families to send their young men overseas. Often they were in search of gold (the period coincides with the discoveries in California, Australia and the Yukon), but sometimes they went as indentured workers or as the spearheads of commercial undertakings. In some ways this was an extension of a well established tradition of 'sojourning' within

China, which involved not merely the scholars of the bureaucracy, who were always posted outside their home districts, but also workers of all kinds (Mann 1997). The pattern of young men leaving their families for work or education was long established in China. In the Qing dynasty:

Male sojourning took many forms. Scholars and officials went sightseeing and traveled to academies and examination halls, in addition to going on the routine circuits that took them to jobs all over the empire. Merchants, artisans and common laborers migrated to conduct business and seek employment. A man sojourning away from home tried to find relatives or friends, or failing that, lodgings through a native-place association or guild that could help provide for his needs. These organizations supplied lodging, meals, health care, and even burial services. They also funded ritual and religious events and festival celebrations (Mann 1997).

Traditionally in Chinese districts where there were considerable numbers of sojourner men, *Tongs* (literally 'halls') based on family name, clan or locale, were established to act as meeting places and benevolent societies, frequently also



Painted papier maché dancing lion c. 1880. Wong Sat collection, Powerhouse Museum.
Wong Sat, a Chinese Goldfields migrant, settled in rural New South Wales in the 1860s, marrying an English migrant and establishing a general store. This was a fragile but treasured family possession.
Photograph: H Feltham 2002

functioning as restaurants and boarding houses. Transported overseas, the *Tong* acted as a continuing stable influence in the shifting pattern of sojourner migration. In many countries the young men were without family resources. Many had wives at home in the villages, and most intended to return once they had acquired sufficient wealth to endow a village Family Temple and build a substantial house – meanwhile they sent back as much money as they could. Many did return, others found new families and lives overseas, a few even managed both (Rolls 1992).

THE CHINESE DIASPORA

These studies have made it clear that ‘things’ in the broadest sense, have a performative and integrative capacity which enables what we call society to come into being, and to continue to go on being itself. We see the study of material culture as part of a concern with praxis, social practice, and objects themselves as one set of actors in a combination of space/place/things/action/people which performs being, which draws from history, which is open to changes, and through which the trajectory of individual and collective lives are created (Pearce 2000).

The same young men who practiced martial arts, joined the village militia and took part in competitive lion-dancing, were also the young men who left China by the thousands in the nineteenth century to find work and sometimes homes in Southeast Asia, America, Canada and Australia. By 1852, when gold was ‘officially’ discovered in Victoria, there were over 2000 Chinese in Australia, many from Fukien, almost all of them men.

For many Chinese the mid nineteenth century was a period of uprisings and reprisals, grinding poverty and oppression, and the only real possibility of relief lay in the sending of young family men to foreign countries in search of well-paid work. Many joined established Southeast Asian Chinese communities, such as those of Singapore, the Malay Straits and Vietnam, but others ventured further afield, particularly to North America and Australia, the ‘new gold mountains’. Here fortunes could perhaps be made in California, Ballarat or the Yukon. This ‘sojourner migration’ was helped by the development of a new kind of shipping and a new kind of trade route. Fast, sleek clipper ship and the ‘roaring forties’ great circle route linked Britain, China, Australia and the USA in a complex economic chain (Blainey 1966).

Leaving their urban and rural occupations in China to become sojourners, the Chinese from Guangzhou soon became a fairly common sight on the goldfields, and seem at first to have aroused no particular animosity, perhaps because their prime intention was to return to their villages. According to the Sydney Morning Herald of 1853:

Many of the runaway Chinese have here made large fortunes, some of the successful members of that nation are gone home (Rolls 1992).

One leg of the chain frequently filled the holds with indentured Chinese labourers, many of whom landed illegally in places such as Hawaii or South Australia, making their way to better opportunities on the goldfields or in the cities. Those who returned successfully (and there was no other way to return) endowed their home villages with ancestral shrines, built large, imposing houses, both complete with guardian lions, and supported the scholarly aspirations of their relatives.

While there was considerable exploitation of poorer Chinese by travel brokers and money-lenders, their arrival in Australia was often cushioned by benevolent societies (*Tongs*) established by earlier Chinese migrants from the same village. Since most Southern Chinese villages were clan or family based and rarely more than three family names were represented, the village functioned as a large extended family. Some of these societies are believed to have had links to the prolific South China martial arts associations, many of which had a revolutionary, anti-Qing dynasty focus (Feltham 2007). Some research into inscriptions on Chinese headstones has suggested that some of the migrants might actually have been political refugees (Personal communication with Dr Lily Lee).

The *Tongs* acted as support networks, dedicated to giving aid to sick and aged Chinese, sometimes arranging for their return to China, sending the bones of the deceased back home for reburial and doing charitable work, including raising of funds for the relief of flood and drought disasters in China. Often these funds were raised through members' gambling activities, and some *Tongs*, particularly in the United States, became synonymous with organised crime in the Chinatowns. Most *Tongs*, however, functioned as a means for Chinese migrants to cope with the alienation and, often, rejection experienced as migrants, helped



Malacca, Malaysia. Paired lions at the entrance to a Chinese temple. Photograph: H Feltham 2007

to preserve language and culture and sometimes acted as a political forum for dealing with non-Chinese officialdom (*The Barkerville Tongs* website 2004). They were also often the support base for local lion dancers and the custodians of ritual impedimenta such as lions' heads, drums, banners and costumes. In this they functioned in much the same manner as village meeting houses and temples in the Southern provinces (Stephen 1997). Wherever they were found, temples and halls were readily recognized by the paired guardian lions at their doors, and served as a base for local lion dancers and martial artists and their equipment. The early twentieth century temple in Retreat Street in Sydney, for instance, is a repository for superannuated lion's heads (Stephen 1997). This ensured the continuity of belief, ceremonial and seasonal ritual in the new land.

According to the Chinese Heritage of Australia Federation Project (2005) societies such as the *Hung Fook Tong* in Sydney, or the See Yup in Bendigo met members on arrival, prescribed dress codes, provided basic food and shelter if required, assisted members with the complex red tape of colonial bureaucracy, and, if necessary, organized the return of the dead to their village cemeteries. They also often organized the ritual festivals of the year, Ching Ming (honouring the dead), Autumn Moon festival and Chinese New Year among them, and were responsible for the banners, lions, dragons and drums that were an essential part of the festivities.

In general soujourners tended to emigrate to areas where there was an existing network to receive them, which resulted in certain districts or even villages sourcing the bulk of immigrants to a particular country or region. In Australia the two most significant sourcing regions were the Siyi (also referred to as the See Yup) Toishan and Zhongshan (formerly Heung Shan) all districts of the Guangdong region of the Pearl River Delta (Cannon 1976, Yong 1977 and Chinese-Australian Historical Society papers).

When immigrants arrived in Australia and America, their willingness to work for low wages, the fact that there were few legal or even illegal Chinese women with them, (the New South Wales census of 1861 found 12,986 Chinese men and only two Chinese women) their reliance on Triad and ‘family’ societies for help and their loud and strange celebrations all made them seem especially alien. Their dress, pigtails, beliefs and rituals did not help, marking them out as singularly alien in a world of strange languages and accents, but familiar costumes, customs and countenances. Incidents like the Lambing Flats massacre of 1861 focused Australian anti-Chinese feelings and brought about work and migration restrictions (Yong 1977). Chinese were blamed for working too hard, for gambling, for smoking opium, for licentiousness. By the 1880s they were being blamed for everything from cholera outbreaks to the economic depression (Cannon 1976). Even the success stories such as the extraordinary tea merchant, restaurateur and unofficial ambassador, Quong Tart, did little to off-set antagonistic attitudes (Fitzgerald 1996). However despite all the restrictions and prejudice, there was scarcely a major city that did not have its Chinese quarter, recognizable from its architecture, calligraphy, annual New Year festival including the lion dance, and, as the community achieved wealth and prosperity, by its guardian pair of Chinese lions marking the boundaries of the ‘Chinatown’.

Involvement with the wider community included participating where possible in parades and festivities such as the Melbourne Federation Parade of 1901, where the Ballarat dragon appeared together with various lion dancers. Their purpose and function seem totally to have escaped the local non-Chinese journalist, whose wonderful description of a lion dance utterly fails to recognize the lion:

At the very tail of the last dragon there came a band of sturdy and athletic men, clad in rose pink, with dark orange sashes, and in their midst was a hideous and gigantic mask, called the "Gawk Gwe" which was marvellously manipulated by those escorting it. It represented some legendary and awful monster which had a commendable habit of seeking for and killing dragons – a sort of Chinese St George, in short – and it was evidently in a terrible rage. It reared, and tossed, and swayed, and pawed about clapping its expressive ears and roving expressive eyes while the smile on its mouth was as wide and as comprehensive as the Commonwealth Constitution. To appease or frustrate it, two youths walked in front of it, and with either hand pointed a stick with a ball on top at its eyes and mouth – another typically Chinese method of defence which has recently been shown in many sterner places than the Melbourne streets. Every two minutes the men working the "Gawk-Gwe" were relieved by some of their comrades, who vied each other in extravagant and suggestive movements (Melbourne Age 8 May 1901).

Very different was the 2000 Sydney Olympics torch relay celebrations. In Sydney's Chinatown, I watched Chinese identity King Fong carrying the torch through densely packed Sussex and Dixon Streets, he was met by at least a dozen local dancing lions, all featuring happily on the evening's news. Sydney's annual and very popular Chinese New Year parades now feature everything from martial arts teams each with three or more lions, to small children in tiny papier maché lion heads.

THE CONTEMPORARY LION DANCE

Semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all of these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification (Barthes 1964).

Today in any large city with a substantial Chinese population lion dances are a common sight – no self-respecting new bank branch, restaurant or shop would open for business without one, and at Chinese New Year, the Moon Festival and other seasonal celebrations they are often out in force. Generally the most commonly encountered lion dances reflect those of the south coast of China, (often literally, Foshan in Guangzhou is still a major manufacturer of lion heads and costumes) reflecting the diaspora of the mid to late nineteenth century (Feltham 2007).

Globalisation has assisted the wide-spread dispersal of the lion dance and ensured its continuity and popularity. Both the continuing diffusion of Chinese people and culture, and the growing niche market popularity of martial arts films and associations, has ensured that the lion dance is performed world wide and is readily recognized and enjoyed. While dragon dances are also occasionally performed, and dragon images are a staple of Chinese restaurants, the lion both as dance and as door guardian is a more direct and concrete marker of diaspora Chinese identity and in both forms can be found virtually world wide – Sydney, San Francisco, Havana, Kuala Lumpur – all celebrate the dance and mark significant spaces with paired lions (Feltham 2007).

In recent years, lion dancing has also become a serious international sport. Occasionally this works against the maintenance of traditional meanings, dance patterns and ritual intent, since driving away evil spirits is not always compatible with getting your sport recognized as an Olympic event. Many younger students are more concerned with the sports/martial arts aspects of



Genting, Malaysia. Competitive lion dancing 2004 Photograph: Jack Move

lion dancing (a constant theme in e-mails on the lion dance network), than with cultural modes and traditional meanings. Newly introduced aspects such as pole-jumping, free-style competitions, and tend to work against the traditional image of a sleepy lion awakening and pursuing a *qing* (goal, usually a lettuce with money in a red envelope attached), with or without the company of a dai tou fut (small monk/Buddha).

Traditions such as the ceremony of opening the eyes of the lion when a new head is used, giving it an awakened soul, and of burning the old lion heads when they become too worn or outmoded, so that their spirits can be freed again, are also being questioned. Selling or donating old lions to new dance groups has become a commonplace, where once they would have been stored in a local Daoist temple or a *Tong* before being consigned to the flames. Other are treasured as art works, or occasionally sold to collectors; a role not allowed for in many traditional martial arts societies.

International competitions such as those held annually in Genting, Malaysia (*International Dragon and Lion Dance* website 2007), draw teams from both Eastern and Western countries. The 2006 competition featured teams from Australia, China, France, Germany, Honk Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Norway the Phillipines, Poland, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The prestigious Lion King of the West title was won by an Australian team, while China and Malaysia were equal overall winners and became the Lion Kings of the East.

Hawaii hosts invitational Lion Dance and Lion King championships, highlighting both extreme and traditional forms of dance, while national championships are held in many of the participating nations. Competitive lion dancing sometimes includes a 'traditional' section, but the emphasis is increasingly on the difficult and even dangerous pole dancing where the two athletes forming the lion perform on a series of poles of about 20 cm diameter, topped with a small, square platform and raised between 3 and 5 metres above the stage. Points for mounting and dismounting are awarded, and the difficulty and athletic prowess of the steps performed on the dangerous structure counts for rather more than the aesthetic aspects. Websites and e-mail forums exist to discuss internationally important aspects of lion dancing and publicise events, and many martial arts groups have their own web sites to publicise their activities including lion dancing. These sites also often include variations on the history and meaning of the lion dance. Often the same text, notable for its somewhat peculiar English, can be found included in the websites of groups from countries as diverse as the USA, England and Malaysia.

But lion dancing continues to maintain its traditional role as a seasonal and festival event, and any city with a respectable Chinese population such as Sydney, Toronto, San Francisco, New York, London, or Kuala Lumpur, increasingly

hosts lion dance events at Chinese New Year and other key celebrations Asian or otherwise, and advertises them actively on-line. Toronto's 2006 festival not only included Southern and Northern lion, and both traditional and pole-dancing events, but also featured a battle between a green lion and a sword-wielding martial artist, representing the South Coast Chinese nineteenth century anti-Manchu movement with the lion in the unusual role of government 'villain'.

Lion dance groups are booked out months in advance, especially for the fifteen days of Chinese New Year when practically every lion dancer can expect to spend hours rehearsing and performing for the traditional red envelope full of cash attached to a lettuce, not simply as part of the general 'Chinatown' celebrations, but commissioned by shopping centres, civic organisations and individual businesses to bring good fortune for the coming year. Lion dancers are also in demand to open new businesses, chasing away evil influences; they are also frequently commissioned to perform at weddings or to welcome visiting dignitaries. In all of these cases they maintain the traditional lion's role of marking transitional seasons, acting as guardians of new enterprise, and reinforcing cultural identity. Often they can be found in the vicinity of the equally prevalent Chinese paired guardian lions whose presence mark out 'Chinatowns' around the world (Hu 1995).

Lion heads continue to be made in the traditional manner, however the development of new lightweight but tough materials is beginning to replace the conventional papier maché, wire and bamboo – although a fibre-glass reinforced lion's head, durable though it may be, is usually a good deal heavier than a conventional model!

Interest in the lion dance has grown alongside an interest in Chinese martial arts, popularised by the exciting genre of kung fu historical and contemporary films from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Most contemporary groups are happy to welcome students from any culture, provided they are willing to undergo the intensive and highly disciplined training. There are now several non-Asian *sifu* (lion dance masters) involved in the training of new generations of lion dancers. However despite the increasingly universal popularity of lion dancing, it remains for many overseas Chinese participants an important way of emphasising their culture of origin, and continuing and developing, Chinese traditions in a new land.

Protocols for meetings between lions continue to evolve; traditionally precedence is given to the 'senior' lion (the lion representing an older-established martial arts society), but this is not always easy to determine, and an offended lion will respond with a highly aggressive dance. Contemporary American protocols (discussed on the on-line Lion Dance forum through October 2004) states that:

When two lions meet, they should move slowly and with lowered heads towards each other, then bow three times, to left, right and centre, then meet head to head in an open-mouth 'kiss' during which the lion head dancers will shake hands and exchange business cards.

CONCLUSION

... 'things' in the broadest sense, have a performative and integrative capacity which enables what we call society to come into being, and to continue to go on being itself. We see the study of material culture as part of a concern with praxis, social practice, and objects themselves as one set of actors in a combination of space/place/things/action/people which performs being, which draws from history, which is open to changes, and through which the trajectory of individual and collective lives are created (Pearce 2000).

The lion dance as an aspect of material culture is a constantly evolving and divergent activity, characterised on the one hand by a weight of tradition and cultural expression which links it to seasonal (Chinese New Year, and other celebratory periods) and special events (opening of new businesses, involvement in multicultural gatherings) and on the other by a fluid ability to relocate within changing cultures (local martial arts traditions, revolutionary movements, international sporting events). The costumes themselves, within a fairly narrow range of visual elements, have remained relatively unchanged over at least the last two centuries, while the materials have adapted to changing technologies (fibreglass, synthetic fabrics).

Carried by migrating southern Chinese communities to new and alien homes such as Australia, the USA, Canada, Southeast Asia, the lion dance gained emotive weight as a cultural mnemonic, establishing itself within evolving overseas communities as a cultural marker alongside the paired lion statues that guarded such liminal spaces as entries to households,

temples, and, for virtually all migrant communities, 'Chinatowns'. Becoming international, the dance's original inter-village competitiveness morphed into high-risk, non-traditional sporting events which, though hotly contested as divergent, attracted a new, younger following encouraging broad community support and helping to re-establish the dance in mainland Chinese culture, where it had gone through a long period of abeyance after it became a target of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

Perhaps the clearest expression of the continuing importance of the lion dance to Chinese communities, both traditional and innovative, comes from the American Chinese writer, Dr. William Hu (1995):

In the Lion Dance of the Ts'ai Ch'ing or 'getting the greens' it becomes a microcosm which epitomises human struggle and survival. Whenever there is a goal, regardless of the difficulties or obstructions placed before it, one may gain success by being conscious of various prerequisites. One must be determined and resolved in order that there be a rewarding and successful ending. Patience, good planning and coordination, unity, ingenuity in development of acquired skills and techniques will help the attainment of the goal. Conservation and the judicious use of resources are required. Perseverance, work and abiding by a plan will in turn obtain success. Laws both natural, legal as well as customary and traditional will bring out a person worthy of gaining and being a steward of success. All human emotions and expressions are portrayed in the Lion Dance such as lust, joy, frustration, sadness, puzzlement, satisfaction, attainment and happiness. The Lion Dance relates to the struggle of Man with Nature and Society. It is a positive and uplifting manner for viewing life itself.

... In every high culture there is still a spiritual inheritance from the distant past, the lofty concept that all super mundane and superhuman motion is dance. Turning about in divine rhythm, the Chinese see cosmic harmony in dance. The Lion Dance is all this, plus a cultural link to the long history of China. It is also an enlightenment for the Chinese to appreciate their cultural heritage and high civilization providing motivation to set forth to conquer new goals (Hu 1995).

GLOSSARY

<i>Chinese festivals</i>	Traditional Chinese annual festivals are lunar-related, rather than occurring on a set date. They include New Year which lasts for fifteen days ending with the Lantern Festival and lion dance, Qingming (usually early April) honouring ancestors, the Dragon Boat festival in May/June, Double Seventh, celebrating the annual meeting of the weaving star and the herdsman, the Moon festival (September/October) and Laba (Buddha's Enlightenment).
<i>Dai Tou Fut</i>	Small, monk or Buddha-like dancer in a pink or blue-faced smiling mask who frequently accompanies a dancing Chinese lion.
<i>Daoism (Taosim)</i>	A variety of interrelated philosophical and religious Chinese traditions having its origins in early nature-worship and animism.
<i>Dunhuang</i>	Chinese city in Gansu Province situated at the junction of the Northern and Southern Silk Roads, it became a military outpost in the Han dynasty. In the early 4th century CE a Chinese Buddhist monk excavated the first of the Mogao grottos in the cliff face overlooking the local river, and for the next several centuries the region flourished as a major centre of Buddhist art and international trade.
<i>Fengshiye</i>	<i>Wind lion lord.</i> Small, usually ceramic lion placed on the capited ridges of traditional tiled Chinese roofs to protect the building and counteract any errors in the feng shui of the site.
<i>Feng shui</i>	<i>Wind/water.</i> Traditional Chinese geomantic (earth magic) system for determining favourable positioning of architectural and engineering structures, building elements, objects and family graves.

<i>Gandhara</i>	Now divided between Northern Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan, the former Buddhist kingdom of Gandhara existed from the 7th century BCE to the 11th CE. Under the rule of the Kushans, a nomadic dynasty who ruled from c.75 to c.450 CE, Buddhist art and architecture flourished in this region, creating a unique style fusing Greek, Persian and Indian elements. Gandhara was a key centre of Buddhist pilgrimage, and Gandharan art spread with monks and merchants along the Silk Road to China and beyond.
<i>Gigaku</i>	An early form of Japanese ritual dance drama predating Noh and Kabuki.
<i>Guanyin (Kwan Yin)</i>	The Chinese goddess of mercy, a manifestation of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.
<i>Han Dynasty</i>	202 BCE-221 CE. In the 2nd CE the emperor Han Wu Di sent first an ambassador and then a military expedition to open the Silk Road.
<i>Hou Hanshu</i>	<i>The Book of the Later Han</i> . A Chinese official history compiled in the 5th century CE by Fan Ye from earlier histories and documents.
<i>Liminal spaces</i>	Physical, psychological and/or metaphysical space characterized by ambiguity and indeterminacy.
<i>Mahayana Buddhism</i>	The branch of Buddhism, characterized by a belief in Bodhisattvas, those who, having attained Nirvana, elect to return to help all living creatures, which followed the Silk Road east to China, Korea and Japan.
<i>Manjusri</i>	A Mahayana bodhisattva associated with wisdom, doctrine and awareness, usually shown riding a lion.
<i>Nien</i>	In Chinese folklore, a seasonally appearing monster who devours lives and crops. He is driven off by the dancing lion.
<i>Prince Shotoku</i>	523-621 CE. Regent of the Asuka period in Japan, he promoted Chinese culture, especially Buddhism and Confucianism.

<i>Qing</i>	The lettuce-like green vegetable ripped to pieces by the dancing lion (after the attached red envelope of money has been delicately removed). During the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1688-1906), the <i>qing</i> took on a secondary, political aspect.
<i>Shishigong</i>	<i>Stone Lion Master</i> . One of, usually, a pair of lion at a Chinese wayside shrine designed to protect against natural disasters.
<i>Shishiye</i>	<i>Stone Lion Lord</i> . Single large male stone lion found guarding the entrance to a Chinese village.
<i>Sifu</i>	The principal master of a Chinese martial arts society.
<i>Silk Road</i>	A generic term for the network of trade routes that crossed Central Asia linking the Mediterranean with the Far East from the early Bronze Age.
<i>Singa Barong</i>	In Balinese tradition, the Barong is a protective spirit and leader of the army of the good, the traditional enemy of the witch, Rangda. While the Barong can take several forms, he is most popular as the Singa Barong, the dancing lion who confronts evil.
<i>Spirit Road</i>	The road leading to a major, usually Imperial, funerary site, protected by carved guardian figures such as <i>bixi</i> , exotic animals, warriors and officials.
<i>Tang Dynasty</i>	618-907 CE. A period of Chinese reunification, multicultural influence, trade and military expansion.
<i>Three Kingdoms</i>	Term for the period of disunion, 220-280 CE, immediately following the fall of the Han Dynasty.
<i>Todaiji</i>	A Buddhist temple complex in Nara, Japan, dating to 743 CE.
<i>Tong</i>	A migrant community support group, usually based a particular locality in China, and associated with a temple and/or martial arts centre. In the USA tongs became associated with secret societies and criminal activities.
<i>Wusuishi</i>	The Chinese lion dance.



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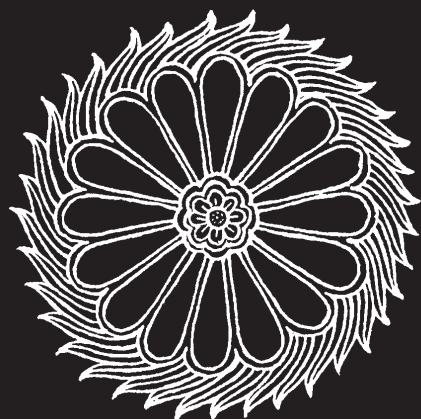
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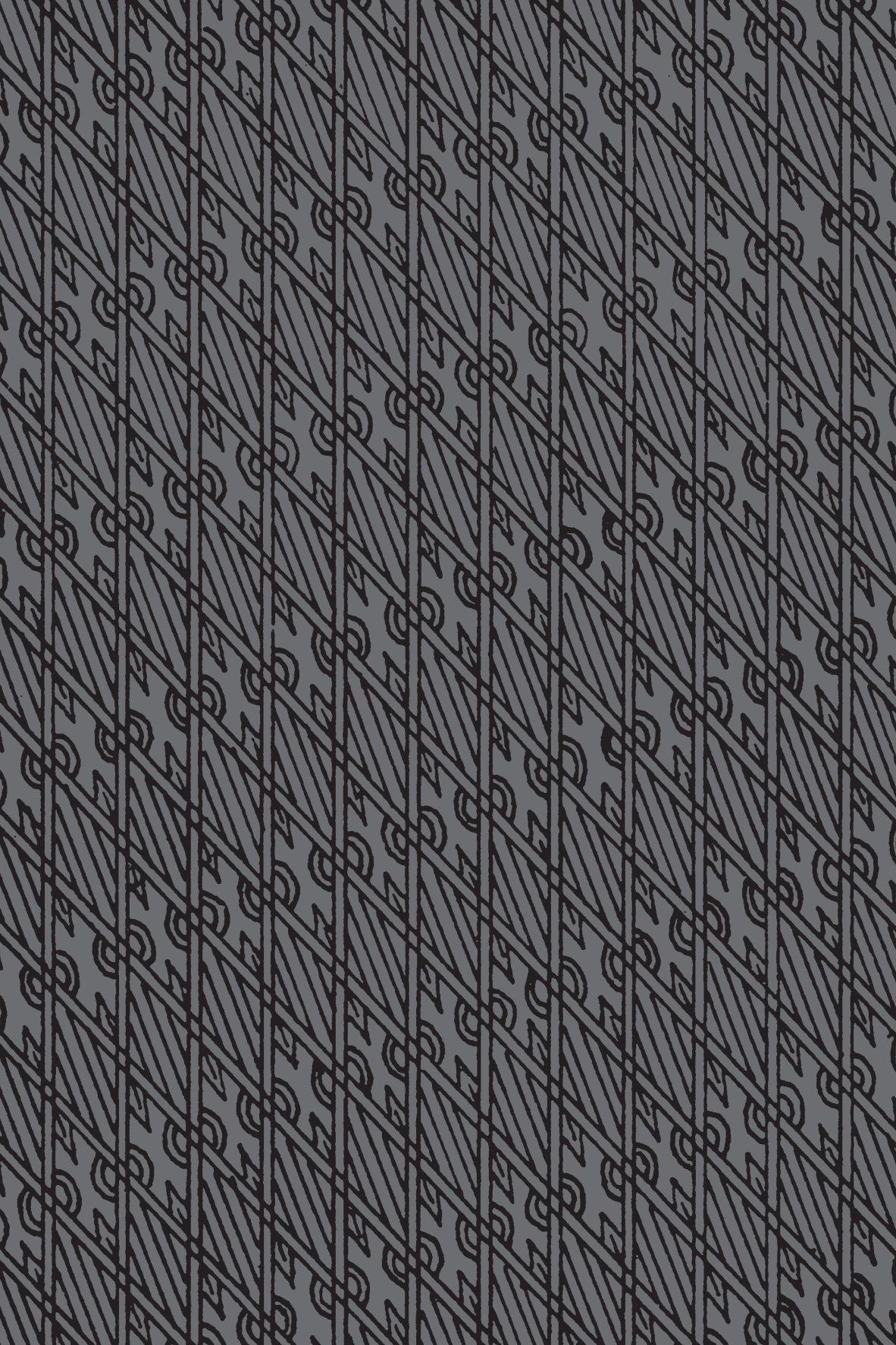
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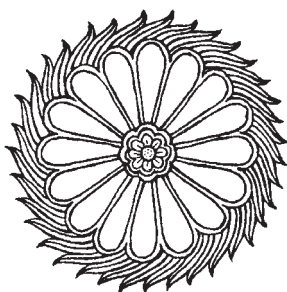
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WORKS LIKE A CHARM
CULTURAL TOURISM, COLOUR
AND ITS EFFICACY IN CHINESE
MIAO TRADITIONAL DRESS





WORKS LIKE A CHARM CULTURAL TOURISM, COLOUR AND ITS EFFICACY IN CHINESE MIAO TRADITIONAL DRESS

Samantha Haux

To think about hue and, in particular, its materiality is to work against the grain of a long history of its dematerialisation in Western science. As Diana Young (2006) tells us, studies in philosophy, art, psychology and brain science (Wittgenstein 1977; Goethe 1987; Gage 1983; Davidoff 1992; Lamb and Bourriau 1995; Hardin and Maffi 1997) and, subsequently, anthropology have neglected the 'emotion and desire, the sensuality and danger and hence the expressive potential that colours possess' by disembodimenting them, reducing them to mere 'sensations' caused by wavelengths of light which are referred to another part of the brain for processing before their realisation in linguistic expression (Young 2006: 173-174).

This chapter charts an exploration through relevant thinking on the experience known as colour by grounding it in specific relation to the act of collecting traditional Chinese Miao textiles in Guizhou Province, Southwest China. 'Colour' in this discussion chiefly refers to the striking quality of dyed thread, as woven or embroidered, in this case, into a ground of silk, cotton or hemp. More abstractly, however, 'colour' also alludes to the notion of *duocai* (colourful, polychromatic), which is often used by more urbane Chinese to describe folk culture (Schein 2000: 143) said to abound, not only in the rural villages of Guizhou, but throughout provincial China where ethnic collectives practising non-Han tradition may be found. This chapter focuses on how



Map of the People's Republic of China (PRC) highlighting Guizhou Province

the former sense of colour, as literally applied to Miao 'Long Skirt' costume, solicits observers' attention during visits to *Shang Langde* (Upper Langde) village¹, an increasingly popular tourist destination which lies 32 kilometres east of Kaili city, nestled in the mountains and outlying rural surrounds. The latter refers to a socio-political context for which the euphemistic metaphor of the ethnic mosaic (Harrell 1995; Moser 1985) stands – an assemblage of 55 officially recognised *shaoshu minzu* (Chinese ethnic groups or 'nationalities'), including nine million so-named Miao, alongside the majority Han. As state journalism, television talent quests and recent telecasts of the torch relay and opening ceremony rehearsals for the 2008 Olympic Games might have viewers know, the harmonious co-existence of *minzu* is aptly mirrored in the myriad of brightly coloured folk costumes staged by their multi-ethnic wearers, often hand in hand, for each show. At Langde, song and dance performance in traditional Miao dress appeals to local political consciousness as an index to these pervasive spectacles of collective national colour. But what of the foreign visitor whose cultural background is markedly dissimilar? In taking the place of the Western textiles enthusiast on cultural tour that departs from Kaili city, colour, specifically the material pigmentation of Miao traditional costume, is still, I believe, far from mere surface ornamentation and a highly agentive force.

The following part of a preliminary study to extended fieldwork takes the form of a series of situated speculations on the way in which ‘exotic’ folk colour affects, at least for the Western collector, cognition via the senses.

UNTOUCHABLES

For local entrepreneurs such as Ms Lu, part time embroidery teacher, colourful minority craft presents a lucrative commodity. Following Deng Xiaoping’s economic and cultural reforms, including affirmative action strategies aimed at improving the social and economic situation of minorities and open-door policy from December 1978, intensity of inquiry into Chinese culture and identity (Schein 1993) has provided local government with ‘folk culture’ as a readily consumable and indispensable regional development resource (Oakes 1997, 1999, 2000). Renewed emphasis on China’s myriad of cultural traditions since the 1980s has thus seen a revival of custom and costuming in song and dance performances that are not only performed in situ at special events or tourist destinations but are televised right across the nation, invariably in the highly feminised and exoticised form of the young, enticing Miao beauty. In Beijing, costumed troupes of minority women are employed for the titillation of varied audiences from official guests of international importance to occasional crowds of spectators in sports stadiums as half time entertainment. In *Qiandongnan* Autonomous Prefecture, Southeast Guizhou, Ms Lu has carved a specific niche market for herself. For while at last official count, the annual tourist derived revenue in Guizhou had risen 41.5% over the past five years and 98% of visitors in 2006 were domestic Chinese, the number of international tourists to Guizhou had also increased – by 73.53% to 107,006 (Guizhou Bureau of Statistics 2007). Of these, a small but steadily growing cohort of Western women passed through Ms Lu’s studio, each in search of exotic crafts and a unique cultural experience.

If the initial attraction to Guizhou for these visitors, whom Hannerz (1996: 103) would term ‘connoisseurs’ of the Other as artworks, had in fact been the Miao textile art works themselves – fascinating embroideries hermetically sealed away from human contact in Western museum cases – then Ms Lu’s workshops break the taboo of the untouchable object to maximise the sensory pleasure to be derived from the close range examination, touching, crafting and first hand

contextualising of such exquisite ethnic garments². At the studio, visitors of varying experiences with stitching and dyeing become acquainted with Miao identity and tradition through a general ethnographic account before a close examination and symbolic and technical analysis of costumes drawn out of Ms Lu's extensive collection. Next, the appropriate materials and equipment are selected for demonstrating something of the art of traditional Miao embroidery, while students handle the cloth by taking needle and thread to it to add one's own Miao-style embellishments. As an entire lesson may be required to complete a length of woven braid enough to hem a single sleeve opening, there is a necessary deepening of empathy for the craftswoman who has worked embroidery or appliqué into the body of an entire garment. The students are then taken to a selection of Kaili's surrounding villages where Ms Lu facilitates a first hand immersive experience for her visitors as they participate as students and onlookers in further embroidery demonstrations, partake of regional food and wine and make subsequent purchases of local craft. In this process of encouraging one to invest her newly collected items with the exotica of the surrounds – unique sounds and smells of the landscape, the close encounters with its inhabitants, region-specific food and distinctive music and dance – the striking colour of Miao costume is foregrounded as an immediate and palpable force.

The sensory transactions that occur between Ms Lu's Western students and Miao residents during village visits are invariably a costume-mediated affair, where colour, as a lure, can be felt by onlookers to trap or ensnare. On visitors' arrival at Langde, now Southeast Guizhou's most established minority 'theme park' style site, for example, Miao villagers spanning some three generations will greet them literally swathed in colour in a welcoming replete with rice wine, dance and music, all to their visitors' delight. Even during harvest in the busiest months of the year, village men will leave their work in the fields to don traditional indigo dyed gowns and take up their horns in song, while the women will exchange their working clothes for the coloured costumes of the 'Long Skirt Miao' (the visually descriptive namesake by which this clan is known). With brightly embellished jackets worn with skirts of narrow embroidered panels that fall to the ankles from the waist, these women appear in horn-shaped headdresses of pressed silver and heavy butterfly shaped necklaces to similar glittering effect. To say that Long Skirt costume colour is merely eye catching would be an understatement that belies, at least for the first time observer,



Ms Zhang dressed for performance at Upper Langde village in traditional Miao Long Skirt costume. Photograph: Samantha Hauw



Detail of panels comprising over skirt,
worn with a finely pleated black underskirt.
Photograph: Samantha Hauw

its brilliance of effect. But the use of this descriptive does provide us with a clue to understanding colour's affective power and its apparently 'grasping' aspect.

COMPOSITION

The kaleidoscopic hues of this Long Skirt costume present a potentially riotous combination, but its shades of red and purple, gold, green and blue, are instead composed in a strikingly balanced array. Working downwards in a vertical direction, a single panel of the over skirt is constructed using tiny strings of pearls to connect three larger panels to two smaller discs that sit in between. The larger panels comprise minor grounds of aquamarine, salmon and burgundy dyed silk which is applied in the sculptural forms of river water and butterflies to a major contrasting ground of black velveteen. With some eighteen or so full panels forming a complete skirt, each features various fish and bird motifs, embroidered in silk thread dyed in individual compositions of diverse – mauve, orange, sky blue, gold, greens, pinks – but what are known as complementary hues which in

colour theory sit directly opposite each other on the colour wheel (Goethe 1971).

Just as in nature, from which both the creative forms of Long Skirt and the science of the colour wheel are drawn, individual colours are arranged in a harmonious affair. Commercial designers know how to and do frequently use this technique well too, for it is their business to manage colour behaviour. They also take a skilled approach, for example, to the arrangement of cool hues which recede and contract and warm that advance and swell. In the world of marketing and advertising, both the inherent behaviour of various colours and their perceived psychological associations are seen as fundamental to the production of emotion and consumer desire. Psychological studies such as those of Shigenobu Kobayashi in his *Book of Colours* (1987) show how further meaning might be drawn through the isolation of this visual realm.

Of 180 chromatic hues and ten achromatic (colours with zero saturation and thus no hue, such as white, black and neutral greys), each arranged by Kobayashi in combinations that correspond to a particular mood, the colour composition of the Long Skirt markedly exude what he has termed ‘alluring’ and ‘luxurious’ qualities with a touch of the ‘dramatic’ and the ‘dynamic’ at the warm end of the colour scale. Using Kobayashi’s studies to understand the direct effect of colour on human emotion can also help us to build a lexicon by which, within the broader discourse of contemporary fashion, we might begin to verbally explain the seduction and charm of traditional Miao costume. A companion handbook, titled *Colourist* (1998), also by Kobayashi, shows that the colours of Long Skirt costume match his word groupings given titles ‘Gorgeous’ and ‘Dynamic’. The first, containing the terms ‘oriental’, ‘alluring’, ‘implausible & mysterious’, ‘sexy’, ‘captivating’, ‘decorative’, ‘luxurious’, ‘gorgeous’ and ‘extravagant’, whilst the other, ‘vibrant’, ‘vigorous’, ‘bold’, ‘thrilling’, ‘passionate’, ‘radical’, ‘dynamic’, ‘dramatic’ and so on. A fairly potent mix then, by these accounts, Long Skirt colour makes for a veritable assault on the psyche that threatens in the very least, according to a tourism advertisement for Langde, to “cause you spellbound” (www.TravelChinaGuide.com). If it is a truism to say that we are all drawn to the very things we feel lacking in our daily lives, then is it possible to read these terms as a web of indicators as to what eludes the blandness of a modern urban existence increasingly over-sanitised (Zardini 2005: 21)?

Of course, this is too broad a question to address fully here. But certainly, where the poetics of the handmade, organically derived garment, produced by the

peasant woman who cultivates her own silk, harvests, dyes and weaves it into cloth before applying exquisite embroidery symbolises, more than ever, today, an enduringly exotic ideal. Modern notions of haute couture epitomise this very idea of high quality garments made from luxurious and ‘raw’ or ‘natural’ fabrics sewn with time consuming techniques and extreme attention to the application of detail. For the few that can afford such garments, along with originality of design this is the very essence of a ‘one-off’s’ appeal. Long Skirt at Langde is thus discursively entangled in a certain culturally and historically specific politics of seeing, where, as part of a romanticised vision rendered in Kobayashi’s (1998) “rich velvety reds, radiant gold, lush purples and black... seen in tapestries, in antique furniture, or in drapes, bedspreads and carpets” (Kobayashi 1998: 66), its meaning gets tinted with cultural associations, such as the ever fading European traditions of needleworking and the act of passing of heirloom garments down through maternal lines.

VIRTUOSITY

It is also more than likely, however, that this particular Long Skirt costume would, on such close examination by Ms Lu’s informed students, be at some point also be exposed a ‘fake’. In other words, Long Skirt worn for tourist performance at Langde is in fact a rapid machine produced reproduction of the ‘genuine’ ensemble which would have taken, at an estimate, close to eight weeks to make. Thus the captivation experienced whilst examining an ‘original’ costume of sufficient age from Ms Lu’s own collection, may be diminished on the presentation of its inferior and ‘modern’ version. In terms of colour, a basic knowledge of dyeing materials and processes would help one to easily discern, for example, an organic blue purple (which is applied during several soakings in a mix of water, rice wine, sometime urine and indigo plant paste) from a synthetic aniline blue or mauve dye (used to infuse cloth more brightly and with greater haste). However, in the process of discerning replica from fake, Long Skirt has by now grasped its beholder’s attention, to rapidly engage her in the pleasure of testing her knowledge against what is to judged, literally more or less, a ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ technical feat. That colour renders pattern and composition visible is integral to a fascination with an artist’s skill or expertise.

As with the best South Asian *ralli* quilts and courtesans' kimono depicted in Japanese woodblock prints known as *bijin-e*, colour placement in Long Skirt appears as a result of steadily acquired craftsmanship and a degree of artistic care. This is because even a superficial glance registers, through the medium of colour, the minutiae of silky thread stitching that comprises silk panel edgings or is built up in textured appliqué and satin embroidered embellishments. Such objects are literally made to be contemplated as evidence of Miao woman's fabled assiduousness and legendary needleworking flair.

The late social anthropologist, Alfred Gell (1998), wrote of Trobriand canoes, to claim that a spectacle of technical virtuosity physically embodied its creator's intentions. These intentions, according to Gell, were in turn the source of their efficacy as a captivating work of art. To illustrate, he recalled his own perceptual process whilst standing before *The Lacemaker* (c.1669-1670) by Vermeer:

Gazing at the picture, my jaw drops in admiration – and defeat... Up to a point, I can be Vermeer, I can identify with his artistic procedure and see his picture, vicariously, as a product of my bodily engagement with the world and with the materials artists manipulate. But once the point of incommensurability is reached, the point at which it is no longer possible to identify Vermeer's agency with my own, then I am left suspended between two worlds; the world in which I ordinarily live, in which objects have rational explanations and knowable origins, and the world adumbrated in the picture, which defeats explanation (Gell 1988: 69).

Particularly for those with a level of familiarity with needlework, sophisticated Miao embroidery begs an unravelling of a comparable technological mystery. Given the speed at which garments are created today with the use of innovative tools such as digital sewing machines, it is possible to speculate that even those familiar with Miao material culture and traditional needleworking techniques will, at some point whilst observing Long Skirt, find it impossible to fully comprehend the exhaustive amount of time and labour that produced the set of garments. And, no matter what can be reasonably deduced about Long Skirt's origins, its makers' real or true intentions, locked away in a mysterious space, will inevitably remain at a tantalising arm's length. A theory, not of what art is, but what it does, and, importantly, does so because it was intended to,

according to Gell (1998), allows us not only to think of colour as constituting the surface pattern by which to recognise a cohesive object but also as the embodiment of social processes which in turn act swiftly to make us think about the circumstances in which it was produced, first by triggering the eye. The rich and varied palette which makes the pattern, and thereby form of Long Skirt so discernable, clearly illustrates that colour is far from mere quality projected by the brain. For as we acknowledge it was at once previously selected by its maker, it also presents a ready indicator (or as Gell says, 'index') which prompts, or at least permits us to speculate as to why.

AMPLIFICATION

The capacity of hue in Long Skirt costume to affect one's emotions and excite the intellect is thus a not an entirely visual phenomenon, but that which merely privileges sight as the primary locus of experience. As all textile collectors and enthusiasts will know, what can be deduced from the chroma, the skin or coating, of fabrics is far from the sum total of the manner in which they are bodily perceived. There is something more about the very materiality and physicality of beautifully coloured cloth that simultaneously begs its beholders to be 'seen'. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) famously argued, taking up an explicitly phenomenological stance, that what we see of the world around us is not simply a film, lacking substance or density, but particular textures that are latent in the form of every thing. Yet even as Ms Lu's students speak of the glossiness of brightly coloured floss silk stitching that is widely used in Miao embroidery or, say, the finely pleated indigo dyed skirts and stiffened jackets starched with egg whites of Shidong (a nearby village also known for its vivid red satin stitched panels) a language of image-colour-textures remains somehow inadequate to express the most immediate sensual quality of these garments' appeal. The renowned connoisseur of Asian textiles, Chris Hall, may have well recognised such verbal limits when summing up what attracts him to a potentially collectable piece. Concisely put, he says it is the 'wow' (in Cantonese '*wah*') factor which sorts the exquisite from the ordinary, describing at once its beautiful detail, its considerable condition, rarity and age (Tan 2005: 13-14). Hall is an expert in his field and his knowledge of it is extreme, thus his has an unusually heightened sensitivity to the rarity of a piece and its ability to shed light on textile history in its given period. However,



Villagers dance and play the lusheng for tourists within the rural surrounds of Langde
Photograph: Samantha Hauw

he does speak of something to which amateur onlookers can also relate: a kind of magic that is experienced by the individual when, in the visible colour-texture of an object, particular desirable elements culminate or meet.

That colour is the amplification of ourselves – our individual situation, histories and knowledge, our emotions and desires – is critical to our enchantment

with a beautiful object. For the visible colour-textures of all objects, like Long Skirt, are necessarily emplaced in space and time. They comprise but an anchor for our own 'period eye' (Baxandall 1972)³ and the multiple kinds of relations, actions, thoughts and sensations that occur for each observer, bodily, as well as in the mind. Long Skirt, for example, forms but a single set of material fragments at Langde within a broader contextual realm, where the visitor's own cultural 'make-up' couples the projected exoticism of its wearers and imagined creators, the quaintness of the wooden village architecture, sounds of jangling pressed silver fringing and village music and the taste of food and wine. Together with the 'pristine' beauty of the outlying rural surrounds, these fragments cause their sensory efficacy to be amplified. The model of the arbitrary linguistic sign may help to speculate upon this process by enabling us to locate meanings drawn by eye from colour as text, discursively, in time. But as we rarely, if ever, perceive the world through one sense alone, particularly in the case of fascination with Miao costume at Langde, it is necessary to consider a more embodied model of apprehension that recognises the unified nature of the human sensorium (Pinney 2002) to go on.

Perhaps the most famous model of uni-sensory perception is that of *synaesthesia*, first championed in academia in 1986 by Lawrence Sullivan but the basis for the much earlier art and poetry of Kandinsky, Keats and Rimbaud, has spurred numerous studies revealing that perception can occur through the intermingling of two or more bodily senses, in cases of hearing or feeling colour, tasting shapes or seeing sounds. The synaesthetic experience has often been set against the purported anaesthesia of a modern existence, as Steve O'Connor (2004) notes, citing the 1857 poem '*Correspondences*' by Baudelaire which presents as a kind of utopian overcoming of modernism's splitting or alienation of the senses into a sharp hierarchical divide. Today's 'taste-able' scents, for example, which emanate from coffeehouse chain stores and certain franchised sandwich outlets are intended to overcome the traditional separation of taste and smell so as to surprise and take hold of at the unsuspecting passer-by. At both geographical and imagined removed from modern urban life, at miles away; the gorgeous colour-textures of the costumes in Southeast Guizhou operate as a lure into a fantastical

synaesthetic-styled sensory realm on a much grander scale. At village theme parks such as Langde, touristic pleasure is derived from having not only one's sight and sense of touch (beautiful embroidery), but also of hearing (music and song), smelling (farming aromas) and tasting (rice wine) each stimulated and woven together in these novel and exotic ways.

From contemplation of the chroma-tactile splendour of embroidered silk to observation of performed ritual and the partaking of regional food and wine, the touristic experience of visiting rural villages like Langde errs on the side of the overwhelming kind, to the point of inducing a slightly hedonistic state of enjoyment, in which any city-worn or numbed sensorium is fairly forcefully revived. And while true synaesthesia is a rare medical condition that only affects one out of 250,000 (women twice as likely as men)⁴, a model of intersensoriality can explain the visual-tactile appeal of Miao embroidery and the way in which the sounds, smells and tastes of Langde are invested by beholders in its fabric ground and consumed by tourists on-site. This model should be distinguished from a general union of the senses, as David Howes (2006) has argued, with intersensoriality allowing for different senses to be prioritised and to intermingle in a certain way in particular situations at certain times. Yet as artefactual extensions of the senses, they also embody the tactile qualities of, say, minutely pleated and woven braid stitched onto silk as well as the array of sensual elements that make up Langde's and rural Guizhou's magical ambience. Thus, even once removed from Langde, it may be possible to perceive, in the luminosity of finely stitched embroidery, the movement of the dancers, the swishing sounds of skirts and *lusheng* (reed mouth organ) music, to taste fermented sticky rice or even smell straw or sun dried corn, to feel the grainy texture of raw silk or even hear the sounds of its imagined creators as the needle perforates the silk of jacket sleeves. Moreover, you may sense these all at once, or some, intermittently, or, depending precisely on where and how you happened upon Long Skirt, equally none of these.



Lusheng [free reed mouth organ] players, Langde Village. Photograph: Samantha Hauw

CONCLUSION

These musings on folk colour and the sensory dimensions of objects, as viewed and handled during stages of a rural Chinese tour, draw attention to hue as a magnetic point of entry to the meaning kept in store. The psychology of colour offers a lexicon by which to express a direct connection between hue and one's emotional state, and psychoanalysis, the opportunity to study symbolic association of the cultural and temporal kind. But in reducing our thinking about the experience of colour to a sensation that needs to be processed by the brain before recognition as a word or phrase we neglect what colour can actually do to structure that experience, how the specific material qualities of each colour are absolutely critical to the way in which that sensory information gets relayed. The case of Langde village serves as a particularly brilliant example of the way in which colour-textures and the context of their emplacement accrue further fragments of information to figure in the density of their meaning. In this embodied account of participation in a folk cultural tour, the multi-sensory power of colour to fascinate invites a further turn to studies in phenomenology and neuroscience in order to think about the agency of colour and how it works. The very substance of Long Skirt hues may make visible, not least to Ms Lu's Western students, an assemblage of technical processes to be discerned by the knowing and exploratory eye. But it intrigues and enchants not only because it embodies pre-existing knowledge and experience of dyeing and stitching materials and techniques but also those things – connection to nature, presumed simplicity, the handmade object, patience and attention to detail – that may be longed for in a modern urban life. Folk colour in Southeast Guizhou is intended, for the most part, exchange for commercial reward. But one need not venture further than the snacks aisle in a local supermarket or the cosmetics counter a department store to become aware of the intended effect of colour upon the body, mind – and purse. While this study points to the materiality of colour as appealing to one's emplaced sensibility, it paves the way for further research in this particular context on the precise details as to why.

ENDNOTES

1. Upper Langde is a working village, situated in the Bala river valley, Southeast Guizhou. It was designated an 'open air museum' for the study of Miao culture rather than pure tourist attraction in 1985. However, as Oakes (1997) notes, this distinction has been difficult to sustain: "Villagers are not unaware of the need to meet the expectations of their visitors, but the idea of a contradiction between authenticity and economic development is generally incomprehensible to them. Villagers thus tend to promote their own commercial tourism development quite vigorously... initiat[ing] several schemes, such as a handicraft shop and a parking lot, with the goal of giving the village more control over tourism revenues" (Oakes, 1997: 57).
2. Personal communication, Ms Lu (2006), Kaili, Guizhou Province, PRC.
3. Michael Baxandall's concept of the 'period eye' emphasises the cultural constructedness of vision (Baxandall, 1972).
4. Recent neurological studies have found that all humans actually possess the ability to perceive the world synaesthetically, though in most of us this holistic way of perceiving the world simply does not reach our conscious awareness (see Cytowic, 1993).

GLOSSARY

<i>achromatic</i>	Colours with zero saturation and thus no hue, such as white, black and neutral greys.
<i>aniline dye</i>	Chemical dye, of which mauve was the first discovered by English chemist, William Henry Perkin, in 1856; used by Miao in Guizhou from the 1880s.
<i>appliqué</i>	Fabric or other ornamentation that is applied to another surface or fabric ground.
<i>bijin-e</i>	Genre of late seventeenth century of Japanese woodblock prints often depicting high-ranking courtesans in decorative kimono.
<i>complementary colours</i>	Pairs of colours situated opposite each other in a colour model such as scientific colour wheels causing a harmonious visual effect when combined.
<i>duocai</i>	Colourful; polychromatic.
<i>Guizhou</i>	Also spelled Kuei-chou (Wade-Giles) or Kweichow; province located in Southwest China with its capital city of Guiyang (see map).
<i>indigo</i>	Colour located on the colour spectrum between blue and violet; a natural dye extractable from several of species of plant, notably <i>polygonum tinctoria</i> in southeastern Guizhou.
<i>Kaili</i>	Seat of Qiangdongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province, home to over fifteen Chinese minority groups.
<i>Shang Langde Folk Village</i>	Guizhou's pioneer minority theme park, following several others throughout provincial China, each modelled on Shenzhen's <i>Zhenxiu Zhonghua</i> (Splendid China) Folk Culture Village (see endnote for further details).

<i>Long Skirt Miao</i>	The namesake by which those living in the Bala River valley villages came to be known to observers following Qing Dynasty field surveys and the subsequent naming of five overarching categories – Black Miao, White Miao, Red Miao, Blue/Green Miao, Flowery Miao; Long Skirt Miao are seen as a subgroup of the Black Miao group.
<i>lusheng</i>	Free reed mouth organ consisting of multiple bamboo pipes, played by various Chinese minorities, including the Miao and Dong, and also in neighbouring countries such as Laos and Vietnam.
<i>Miao</i>	Officially recognised by the government of the PRC since 1949 as a linguistically and culturally related group of people; now one of 56 shaoshu minzu, numbering nine million, approximately half of whom live in Guizhou Province.
<i>Qiandongnan</i>	Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Southeast Guizhou, PRC.
<i>ralli quilts</i>	Traditional quilts made by women in Sindh, Pakistan, western India and surrounding areas; comprised by patchwork and often appliqué and embroidery.
<i>sensorium</i>	The sum of an organism's perception; the entire sensory apparatus.
<i>shaoshu minzu</i>	The 55 Chinese ethnic groups or nationalities which comprise 8% of China's population along with 92% Han Chinese.
<i>synaesthesia</i>	Neurologically-based condition in which two or more bodily senses are experienced jointly.

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*pseudonyms used in this research to protect participants' privacy



FLUTTERING LIKE
FLOWERS IN A
SUMMER'S BREEZE

HAIR JEWELLERY OF CHRISTIAN
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FLUTTERING LIKE FLOWERS IN A SUMMER'S BREEZE HAIR JEWELLERY OF CHRISTIAN MOLUCCAN WOMEN OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIES

Marianne Hulsbosch

Investigation into Indonesian jewellery and items of body decoration unearths a plethora of articles describing in minute detail the exquisite decorative elements and materials used, techniques employed, as well as their ethnic and/or tribal heritage (Beran 1980; de Jonge & van Dijk 1995; Ghysels 2001; Sachse 1907; M. P. Taylor & Aragon 1990: 46); in addition many scholars analyse their historical, cultural, symbolic, religious and socio-political meaning in society (Hoskins 1998; Leigh 1989; Summerfield & Summerfield 1999; Wilson 1994), or their place and role in private or public collections (Budiarti 2005; Ernawati 2005; Sri Hardiati & ter Keurs 2005). The spectacular array of jewellery items fashioned and used throughout Indonesia's culturally rich and diverse archipelago bears testimony to the inventiveness, skill and creativity of its makers. These specific items of material culture are also a potent visual tool that continuously defines the individual and the collective through an ongoing process of appropriation and reconceptualisation of society. However it is this potent aspect of material culture that is often ignored. Visual identity can be constructed through the means of material culture by considering the relationships between material culture and the body, or, more precisely, how the body as a basis of social interaction, was presented in society. Given the

assertion that identity is articulated with and on the body through items of dress and adornment, it follows that the perspective assumed is that of personal agency. A central theme throughout this chapter is the manner in which material culture is experienced and used.

This chapter analyses the ways identity of the Christian Ambonese who inhabited the central Moluccan islands of the Dutch East-Indies during colonial times, was negotiated through hair jewellery. I do this by appraising the influences of personal embodiment, race, ethnicity, politics, socioeconomic standing, education and religion on the ongoing development of adorning the head with particular hairstyles, hair jewellery and means of deportment. I argue that processes of development and usage of hair jewellery and posture determine the parameters from which aspects of visual identity are constructed. I examine the contributions of aesthetic and communicative aspects made by design, production and consumption of hair jewellery to the social and cultural character of Christian Ambonese and how they were mediated by relationships between political and socially dominant and subordinate groups external to, and within Christian Ambonese society during the last decades of Dutch colonial rule (1900-1942). These relationships became the impetus for defining identity and were complicit in the development of hair styling and hair jewellery.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY USED

All bodies in all cultures are somehow decorated, dressed, or adorned (Eicher, Evenson, & Lutz 2000: 4; Kaiser 1990: 3), be it with found or made objects, or with markings applied directly on or to the body (Entwistle 2000: 6). Rather than interpreting the adornment of the hair as pastiches of cultural symbols, I consider these items as creative visual products, intimately associated with dimensions of control, desire, and relationships to the self and with others. I argue that in the context of Christian Ambonese society the development and manipulation of hair adornment was not only intended to visually shape and decorate the head, but that these actions simultaneously informed local society through shaping and defining personal and collective socio-political identities. These adornment systems are not passive outcomes representing a predetermined individuality, but active ingredients constantly used to negotiate,

structure and restructure identity.

The theoretical position used to analyse the hair jewellery of the Ambonese is that of a multi-methodological cross-cultural approach that is predominantly concerned with social change effected through agency. Following Bourdieu (1999) I will argue that the development of Christian Ambonese hair jewellery found its impetus in the political constraints of the Dutch colonial era. Creative action taken by Ambonese women in constructing a visual identity was based on their ethnic habitus and colonial history (Bourdieu 1999: 82). In doing so Christian Ambonese women turned ethnic identity into a commodity that signalled one's past and present position in society and as such securing a future.

Griswold (2004) considers material cultural artefacts 'collective, not individual, creations' which are 'unique to their creators but [as the] fruits of collective production, fundamentally social in their genesis' (Griswold 2004: 53). If dress and adornment provides indeed 'a window through which we might look into a culture' (Arthur 1999: 1), then hair jewellery can be viewed accordingly. In the same way that a window provides not only a look in but also a look out, hair jewellery not only offers us a view of the culture that developed it, but provides us with an indication of the intent of the individual, as it is this intent that the collective subsequently responds to.

CONSTRUCTING VISUAL IDENTITY

According to Arthur (1999) an adorned body visually attests to the 'salient ideas, concepts and categories fundamental to that culture' (Arthur 1999: 1). Decorating the body means being engaged in complex processes of self- and group determination through visual expression. These processes relate to the acquisition and portrayal of identity. Constructing the self through outward expression creates identities that are informed by embodied, historical, socio-political, cultural and religious experiences. These identities, either associating with, or questioning the collective, are fleeting and fragmented units of the matrix that makes up the self. Individual identity is not only confined to visual presentation of the self, but extends these boundaries to incorporate social and collective entities made up of commonly held cultural values and norms. Bourdieu (1984) considers the body as an unfinished entity that incessantly

develops in conjunction with various social forces (Bourdieu 1984). By extending personal attributes and embracing social forces with material culture, physical expression, spiritual, character and body maintenance regimes, the body amalgamates into a unified presence. Although some of these practices are internalised and somewhat obscure, they are emphasised through careful cultivation of outward expression (Foucault 1978: Volume III).

Adornment is not static and continuously breaks through defined cultural boundaries by visually proposing reconstructed views and attitudes towards the body. This ongoing confrontation elicits a questioning and forces a review of existing common values and ultimately results in social change. Adornment of the body then, has the conflicting ability to confirm and elicit ongoing social transformation (McCracken 1988). Therefore, I do not consider adorning the body as merely a passive emulation process in response to society (Simmel 1904; Veblen 1954 (1899)) but rather as an active, constant innovation that helps shape society (Griswold 2004).

THE IMPETUS OF AMBONESE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN A COLONIAL CONTEXT

In the Dutch East-Indies colonial political power not only repressed, but simultaneously nurtured ethnic identity. Since the arrival of Europeans in the Indonesian archipelago in the fifteenth century, successive colonial governments combined with religious fervour targeted dress and personal adornment of the local people. Initially only members of the indigenous population who earned the right to work for the Dutch government, and those Eurasians who could claim Dutch birthrights enjoyed the right to wear items of western clothing (J. G. Taylor 1983). Throughout Dutch colonial times, political indifference towards the common indigenous population created an absence of colonial awareness of visual identity amongst native layers of society. However, indigenous invisibility gradually merged into view during the latter half of the nineteenth century modernist liberal thinking increasingly permeated indigenous attitudes about ethnicity and national identity. This new way of thinking activated a cultural re-awakening and resulted in a desire to define and (re)construct ethnicity in a most authoritative manner: through strengthening

native cultural knowledge, values and principles and interrogating ethnicity via visual presentation.

The need for visual realignment of Ambonese culture became more acute during the early twentieth century, when more western women settled in the Moluccan islands maintaining their strong sense of Dutch identity and introducing ideas and examples of western sartorial presentation. Dutch expatriate values and norms began to define colonised Indies society resulting in a monumental shift in the position of indigenous women. Some found themselves relegated from previously held high status miscegenation, to low ranking positions of domestic servants, whilst others were forced to return to their *kampung* (rural village) (see for example: Gouda 1995; Locher-Scholten 1997, 2000; Stoler 1995; J. G. Taylor 1997).

The collusion of these political, social and cultural forces created unlimited potentialities for indigenous women to visually assure ethnic identity. In the Moluccan islands this meant articulating Amboneseness, the core of which lay in Ambonese *adat* principles (unwritten traditional customary codes regulating social, political, and economical laws). Personal decoration became a common form of Ambonese self-realisation, because it imposed *adat* directly on the body. The Ambonese objectified autochthonous body adornment by transferring cultural signification to specific decorations and material items such as headdresses, items of jewellery and bark clothing. By adopting these material cultural artefacts as *adat* dress, core Ambonese values and beliefs were communicated.

Synthesis and reconfiguration of materiality exemplified execution of engagement with unique Ambonese characteristics and evolving design and technologies. This convergence produced material objects that were used to present 'true' ethnic identities. Ambonese identities discussed in this chapter are true visual images of ethnic identity in the sense that they are the products of interplay between various measures that are circumscribed by *adat* practices, technologies of the self, religious exposure, and colonial and local power structures. Unity of these discourses defined development and transformation of the ethnic self and the objects related to achieve this transformation (Foucault 1970 (1969 French version): 32-33).

AUTOCHTHONOUS AMBONESE HAIR DECORATION

Autochthonous head and hair decoration relates to adornment praxis that existed prior to European settlement and can be distinguished from early written and illustrated records of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, as well as photographic material from the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Interpretive analysis of the development of this material throughout European intervention clearly shows how Ambonese autochthonous hair decoration reconciled influences of colonial, religious and western socio-cultural concepts into new forms and practices.

Early pre-European autochthonous Ambonese body covers were associated with the body's surface and comfort. It was not a social system as it was monadic: it related purely to the body itself. The intuitive mapping of embodiment advanced cognition of physical needs, allowing for optimum functioning of the body within the Ambonese context. The decoration of the head that developed in the period leading up to foreign incursion emerged from basic fundamental needs directly known through physiological understanding and essential environmental knowledge (Boelens, Fraasen, & Straver 2001: 155). The items included organic head wraps made from banana leaves; caladium leaves or sections cut from a leaf of the pandanus tree and acted as a protective measures. They were used as a sun or rain shelter and were fastened with strips of grass or bark cloth.

AUTOCHTHONOUS WOMEN'S HAIR STYLING

Indigenous Ambonese children's hair was kept short, but from puberty onwards hair was long. Young *jojaros* (unmarried girls) wore their hair loose and decorated it with organic material such as flowers and leaves. Thin long strips of bark cloth or grasses were twisted or plaited into a cord and used to secure the hair, with the ends dangling loose from the back of the head.

Married women's hair was twisted in a bun and styled over a coconut shell or a small bundle of grass or coconut husk to give it volume. Plaited and decorated cords similar to the ones worn by *jojaros* kept the hair in place. It was the

Young *Jojaro* (virgin) with her hair wrapped in bark cloth, secured and decorated with grasses and vines. Photograph: KITLV collection



distinction between local clans, combined with a geographical location (inland or coastal) that brought about various identity markers or clan affiliation. Cords were decorated with beads made from animal teeth, seedpods or shells and stained or painted with natural dyes. For special occasions women attached bird of paradise plumes and feathers, as well as *cinkeh* (clove), *sapalene*, *en puti*, *kupu pakuro* and *jasmine-sambac* flowers (Riedel 1886: 64).

A STRATIFIED SOCIETY

From the beginning of Dutch rule, colonial authority actively encouraged Dutch men into concubinary relationships with ethnic women to ‘cement alliances’ (J. G. Taylor 1983: 72). Thus for ethnic women, the surest way to gain the highest social rank in Ambonese ethnic society was through marriage. The legacy of sexual unions involving European men (colonial officials, the military, traders, planters etc) with local women resulted in a large creolised society. Children born of European fathers who legally recognised their offspring automatically gained European status. Children who were not acknowledged were considered ‘native’ and therefore fell under native rule (see: Bronkhorst & Wils 1996; Locher-Scholten 2000; Stoler 1995; J. G. Taylor 1983).

Ambonese women’s social status was mobile as they did not only adopt the status of their husbands through marriage, after 1871 it was also possible for ethnic Ambonese to apply for reclassification of legal status and obtain European status. However criteria for eligibility were: an excellent knowledge of the Dutch language, being Christian, and a proven record of ascribing to ‘European mores and values’ (J. G. Taylor 1983; van Baardewijk 1998: 81). Most of these skills could only be gained through Dutch language education, a privilege usually reserved for Ambonese men. Within this context a broad hierarchical structure ensued. The different socio-economic levels commanded prescribed adornment and embodied regulations and the various social orders were reflective of their unique colonial heritage. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century Ambonese ethnic society visually displayed differing economic and social discourses across three distinct groups. Layers of social significance were demonstrated through particular items and combinations and meaning was clearly understood.

NINETEENTH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

The nineteenth century saw the birth of a distinct method of women's hair maintenance, styling and decoration. Although autochthonous hair decoration was a visible manifestation of abstract concepts of traditional *adat* principles representative of the naissance of Ambonese culture, colonial incursion and foreign trade influences had a direct and long-lasting impact on Christian Ambonese women's attitude to hair maintenance.

Throughout the nineteenth century Ambonese women retained notions of *adat* but infused these with Christian religious and western socio-cultural concepts of womanhood. This resulted in unique repertoires consisting of elaborate maintenance regimes, unique hairstyles, spectacular decorative hair jewellery and ritual practices exemplifying Ambonese culture. Over time these hairstyles and decorations were carefully imbued with social, political and religious status. This facilitated women's realization into the stratified layers of Christian Ambonese society, visually underscoring their unique socio-economic, political and cultural position.

Women's hair maintenance regimes were quite extensive. The hair was rubbed daily with *santen* (coconut shavings) and conditioned for at least one hour, then washed with a mixture of coconut milk and *Citrus hystrix* extract to obtain shine. When the hair was styled it was gelled with the viscous juice of the leaf of a waringin tree to straighten the kinks. Often hair was plucked away from the forehead. Body hair was sparse due to the frequent use of pumice stone, and hair under the armpit was plucked. Hair around the pubic area was not removed for fear of impotence (Jansen 1939: 333; Riedel 1886: 40).

At the beginning of the twentieth century particular Ambonese hairstyles and hair jewellery assumed fetish-like significance according to their value as status markers. Like *adat*, which was based on precise principles and steps of engagement, hairstyles involved a precise unison of hairdressing with measured items of hair jewellery indicative of life rites, age, legal status and education. Styling rules were maintained in the strictest sense to uphold continuity of status. Deviation from these rules or transgression of their clear-set boundaries was concomitant to treason and women were taunted, spat at, or severely ridiculed by her peers, or members of a higher socio-economic stratum (Riedel 1886: 64).



Lower class women with their *kondé falungku* (fist-shaped hair bun) encircled by a *bunga ron* (a wreath of flower buds)

Simple
tortoiseshell
sisir (comb)

Korkupings (hairpins)
fixed around the
kondé, (hair bun)

Ambonese social surveillance and societal expectations saw to it that standards were rigidly maintained.

In addition Christian Ambonese women used their hair jewellery as an intrinsic part of sexual discourse. The back of the head was decorated heavily with an assortment of jewellery items, and it was the back that was scrutinised by the young *mungarés* (unmarried men). They were not allowed to directly look young *jojaros* in the eye.¹ A woman's back – and by extension the back of the head – asserted sexual availability. Women were free to display their marital status on their backs and hair jewellery became an integral tool of female Ambonese identity construction (Hulsbosch 2004: 46).

LOWER CLASS WOMEN

Women who occupied the lowest class lived in the *kampongs* (small village or compound) and tended the land, or were employed by the Ambonese middle class and the colonial elite in such jobs as nannies, cooks and seamstresses. During the day young indigenous *jojaros* wore their hair loose but married lower class women twisted their long hair in a *kondé falungku* (fist-shaped hair bun) at the back of the head. Long hair was twisted tightly and coiled into a chignon, which was held in place by a strip of bark. During special occasions a *bunga ron* (a wreath of flower buds) was wrapped around the *kondé*. Initially these wreaths were plaited with fresh *melati* (jasmine) flowers and clove buds but during the course of the nineteenth century the fresh buds were replaced with buds carved from the marrow of the *papaceda* bush. (Riedel 1886: 71; van Hoëvell 1875: 86).

MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN

The Ambonese middle class consisted of Eurasians or ethnic women with European status, such as wives and daughters of schoolteachers or the *kepala soa* (chief) who was in charge of an administrative section of a *kampong*. These women were not physically involved in hard labour and therefore they had more opportunities to spend time grooming themselves. Their daily hairstyling consisted of twisting the hair in a *kondé falungku* and decorating this with a

simple curved *sisir* (comb) made from bone, horn or tortoiseshell and three silver or golden *korkupings* (hairpins) fixed to the left side of the *kondé*. The position of the *korkupings* and the absence of a *sisir* indicated marital status: a married woman placed one *korkuping* on either side of the *kondé* and the third one on top in lure of a *sisir*. A widow did wear a *sisir* and positioned it on top of the *kondé*, with all three *korkupings* pinned on the right side.² During special occasions a *bunga ron* of similar shape and design as worn by lower class women was wrapped around the *kondé falungku*.

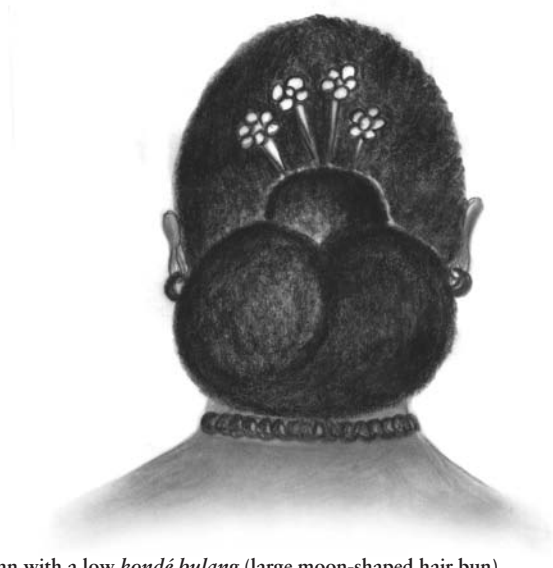
Korkupings were detailed silver floral buttons fixed on a long pin about 9 centimetres in length. They were family heirlooms and it is unclear where the designs originated. The most popular *korkuping* design is identical to the Dutch *Zeeuwse knopje* (Zeelandian knot). This is a pin that decorated the hats and shawls of traditional women's dress of Zeeland, a Dutch province. This pin has been dated as far back as the seventeenth century, a time when many Dutch ships plied the waters off the eastern Indonesian islands (van der Poel 1981: 34). It is possible that the use of the *korkupings* found its origin back in the Netherlands as *Zeeuwse knopjes*.



Middle class widow, wearing a *sisir* (comb) on top of her *kondé falungku* (fist-shaped hair bun), with all three *korkupings* (hair pins) placed on the right side. In addition she fastened a *bunga ron* (wreath) around her hair bun

UPPER CLASS WOMEN

The highest-ranking ethnic women within Christian Ambonese society were traditionally the wives of the local minister, the *rajab* (the head of the village) or Eurasians (Sachse 1907: 72). The majority of these women served as members of church councils and some worked as teachers in Sunday schools. These were highly sought after government-sanctioned positions, making these women much admired in the local community. These prestigious jobs elevated a woman to the highest Christian Ambonese ethnic status and her specific hairstyle indicated her economic and educational achievement.



Upper class woman with a low *kondé bulang* (large moon-shaped hair bun) at the nape of the neck, fastened with four *korkupings* (pins)

Hair was twisted in an unadorned *kondé bulang* at the nape of the neck. This was a large moon-shaped bun, frequently shaped over a *cemara*, a false hairpiece made of coconut husk, to give it volume (van Hoëvell 1875: 34). Side-whiskers were carefully trimmed and twisted into a 'J' facing the earlobe. This *anak rambutan* or *anak J* was gelled down with the juice of the leaf of a waringin tree (*Ficus benjamina*).³ The large shape of the *kondé* marked her status and during the weekend the *kondé bulang* was wrapped in a *bunga ron*. As she enjoyed the highest rank in Christian Ambonese society she wore an additional *korkuping*.

For single women all four hairpins were fanned out in a semi-circle on top of the *kondé*; for married or widowed women all *korkupings* were placed on the right hand side of the *kondé* (van Hoëvell 1875: 85). A large silver *sisir* completed the hair jewellery.

Seventeenth-century Portuguese/Spanish influence on Ambonese hairstyle and jewellery played a prominent role in the development of Ambonese hairstyles. The Spanish fashion of wearing long hair swept up in a bun at the back of the head adorned with a high shaped comb and decorative pins became fashionable all over Europe and stylish Iberian women of that time trimmed the side locks and turned them into a J shape facing the ear (Anderson Black & Garland 1980: 115).

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Christian Ambonese wedding attire was considered the epitome of fashion and reached its zenith during the inter war years.⁴ A wedding in a modernist, highly cultured Ambonese society became the ultimate opportunity to exhibit an idealisation of a constructed Ambonese identity that was based on adat values and shaped by European colonialism, Christianisation efforts and the continuous influences of various trading cultures. It was during this celebration that the magnificent spectacle of hair jewellery was on display (Hulsbosch 2006b: 7).



Christian Ambonese bride showing her *gigi anjing* (dog's teeth); a plaited strip of bamboo tied around the forehead to accentuate the face and define the hairline

HAIR STYLING

Meticulous hair styling was an important part of the ritual involved in the preparation of the bride and it was through the hairstyle that one could ascertain her rank. The number of hairpins worn inferred social status, and the precious materials used in the hair ornaments implied economic status (Hulsbosch 2006b: 8). Wedding clothes were often borrowed or leased, but hair ornaments were family heirloom pieces of the bride's clan and constituted an important part of her dowry.⁵

The bride's hair was brushed severely back from the face and at the centre back divided into two ponytails. These tails were tightly coiled, intertwined and pinned down into a *kondé ékor bébéék* (duck tail bun). The neck hair was separated and combed up and over the base of the *kondé* in two flat locks and twisted in such a way that it resembled a duck's tail. No wisps of hair were to fall loose, so the hair was gelled with coconut milk or with the juice of the leaf of a waringin tree.⁶ The lock in front of the ear was turned into a J-shape facing the earlobe and gelled down.

To keep hair out of the face the forehead was shaved back, bar some wisps that were curled into small locks and pasted down. A plaited strip of bamboo called *gigi anjing* (dog's teeth) or *lokis* (from the Dutch term *lokjes*, meaning 'hair locks') was tied around the forehead to accentuate the face and define the hairline. Some upper class women secured their hair locks with Indian forehead jewellery consisting of chains of precious metals such as gold or silver with inlay of gemstones, pearls or shell (Valentijn 1724-26). These chains found their way into the Moluccan islands via the trade routes plied by Indian merchants. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the custom of forehead shaving faded and the locks and forehead jewellery gave way to a *gigi anjing* made of black velvet *ric-rac* ribbon.⁷

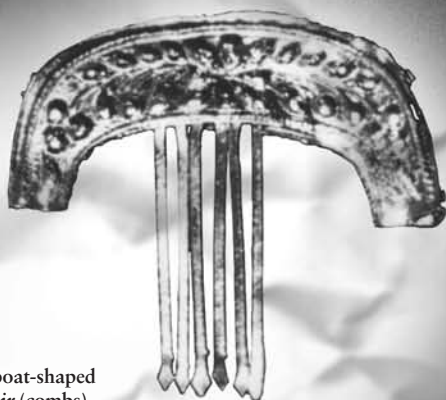
HAIR JEWELLERY

The truly unique feature of an Ambonese bride was her hair jewellery. The *kondé ékor bébéék* was wrapped in a *bunga ron* and held in place by a large silver or gold sisir in the shape of an overturned *arumbai* (Moluccan boat) (Hulsbosch 2006a: 8). This comb was set high at the top of the bun and resembled the

mantilla combs of Spanish women. The number of the pins worn corresponded with the social rank of the bride; the amount was calculated as twice the regular number of pins.⁸ Thus an upper class woman put eight silver *korkupings* in her *kondé*, four on either side of the *kondé*.

As well as the *korkupings bunga goyang* (quivering hairpins) fanned out from the sides of the *kondé ékor bébék*. Only brides wore these ubiquitous gold or silver flower-shaped *bunga goyang*. A tight metal coil of about 7 centimetres in length was inserted between the hairpin and the flower. All of these pins bar one, were placed in a circle around the outside *kondé*, the flowers, heavily decorated with diamantes and pearls swayed on the coil with the slightest movement of the head. Again the social standing of the bride prescribed the material and the number of *bunga goyang* worn. Twelve gold *bunga goyang* for upper class women or ten silver ones for middle class brides, however the last *bunga goyang* was a very specific one and much larger and more decorative than the other *bunga goyang* in the set. It was this last pin that was placed in the centre of the *kondé* (Hulsbosch 2006a: 9). These whimsical hairpins fluttered like flowers in a summer breeze, radiating from the bride's face and framing it in an illuminated manner as light refracted from diamantes and gold sparkles.⁹

Constructing Ambonese identity through movement and utilising hair jewellery was integral to defining and institutionalising socio-cultural, political and economic contexts of ethnic Ambonese society. Objectifying social relations through *bunga goyang* and expressing these associations physically, identity construction became in the words of Bourdieu (1984) 'bodily experiences' (Bourdieu 1984: 77). In addition, *bunga goyang* were used as the ultimate device to articulate ethnic values and 'straightness' of character. A restrained physical posture and a straight back with head held high were fundamental defining criteria that showcased Ambonese ethics, morals and ideals. *Bunga goyang* underscored these highly desirable embodied characteristics as a right and proper bride was at pains to reduce the movement of these pins to an absolute minimum. The slightest movement of *bunga goyang* indicated corruption or flaw of moral character. Whilst movement as a result of wind or draught were considered as spiritual affirmation of the moral high standing of the bride and the appropriateness of clan union through marriage.¹⁰



Three boat-shaped
gold *sisir* (combs)



The 12th pin in a set
of *bunga goyang*
(quivering hairpins),
a large and heavily
decorated gold or
silver pin placed
at the centre of
a bride's
hair bun



Two silver
korkupings
(hair pins)



A gold and diamante *bunga goyang*
(quivering hairpin)

Ethnic Ambonese weddings became a means of infusing *adat* principles with the external condition of colonial reality, in particular through the objectification of Christian virginality. This was exemplified in the course of wedding rituals with its associated materiality and it was here that binary opposites were most prevalent (Hulsbosch 2006b: 6). A unique cultural, religious, historical and colonial pastiche was graphically displayed with two specific practices involving hair jewellery. In the first instance, the custom of physically releasing a family member to join another clan played out in the bride's compound. After the bride completed the dressing and grooming ritual and before she left for church, her mother placed the last pin in the set of *bunga goyang* in the centre of the *kondé*. This large heavily decorated pin signified the acceptance of the mother in releasing her daughter to the groom's clan.¹¹ In addition this *bunga goyang* symbolised the bride's clan's recognition and approval of the groom's bridewealth as a compensatory function to make up for the loss of her potential earnings and costs incurred in raising her.¹² Thus this heavily decorated piece of hair jewellery acted as the conduit through which ethnic culture connected with colonial culture.

The second ritual occurred when the newly married couple left the church and the mother of the bride placed a *tikam kroonci* (crowning pin) just below the centre of the *kondé*. According to van Hoëvell (1875) this 'Jungfernkranz crowned the Immaculate Conception' publicly declaring the virginal state of the bride (van Hoëvell 1875: 133). It was richly decorated with gold and red ribbons and resembled a cockade. The ribbons formed a rosette around the flower head of the pin, making it appear like an insignia whilst the ends of the ribbon hung free. The act of pinning the *tikam kroonci* on the head of the bride conceptualised the Christian canon of chastity prior to marriage objectifying female virginity, whereas the pin materialised virginity literally into a badge of honour. This crowning pin acted as the reverse conduit of the pin, which was placed in the centre of the *kondé* as the *tikam kroonci* connected colonial culture with ethnic culture.

Unique hair jewellery of an upper class bride consisting of: 11 silver *bunga goyang* (quivering hair pins) crowning the outside of the head *bunga ron* (wreath) 8 gold and diamante *korkupings* (hair pins) placed around either side of the *kondé ékor bébéék* (duck tail shaped hair bun) gold *sisir* (comb) on top of the hair bun. The 12th heavily decorated, large gold and silver *bunga goyang* (hair pin) in the centre of the hair bun, the pin features diamante and pearls. *Tikam kroonci* (crowning pin) a ribbon rosette fashioned around a pearl, placed at the nape.



CONCLUSION

Political alignment with the Dutch colonial government, and the desire to maintain ethnic independence forced reorientation of the ethnic self. The growing cry of nationalism and an ever-stronger resurgence of ethnic awareness during the latter course of the Dutch colonial period created a powerful resolve among the Ambonese to develop systems that represented core *adat* principles and values on and through their bodies. Within an increasingly unstable political environment Christian Ambonese women drew upon their personal and collective ethnic memory to create powerful symbols of cultural comment. Deep understanding and long experience of creative application facilitated articulation of identity through material culture, which became a celebration of political allegiance and cultural sovereignty. The leitmotiv used by the Christian Ambonese in the development of material culture was the collaboration of *adat* significance with Christian puritan ideology. It was this successful alliance that provided for a deconstruction and re-formation of original forms of Ambonese material traditions and opened the way for the implementation of modernist appropriations of a variety of cross-cultural material practices, processes and objects, which became part of Christian Ambonese grooming lexicon. Rather than depicting an unchanging ancient past, reification of material culture was testimony to a requisition of ethnic confidence that found its assurance in its own continuous cultural narrative.

The Ambonese highlighted their creative ability to graft cultural significance and meaning onto practices through careful selection, combination and placement of specific material elements; making these processes a metonym for identity. The power of materialising Ambonese identity was contingent on the interconnections between dynamic matrixes of everyday social life, individual and collective agency, an astute sense of ethnic history and the ability to recast external colonial influence whilst simultaneously adhering to *adat* conventions. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the styling and decorating of Christian Ambonese women's hair.

ENDNOTES

1. Personal communication, Matitaputty, A. M. (2001) The Netherlands; Patty, T. (2001).
2. The Netherlands; Seluta, D. (2001) The Netherlands; Uneputty, J. (2001) The Netherlands.
3. Personal communication, Seluta, D. (2001) The Netherlands; Siwalete, C. The Netherlands.
4. Personal communication, Matitaputty, A. M. (2001) The Netherlands; Munumete-Siahaya, L. (2001) The Netherlands.
5. Personal communication, Patty, T. (2001) The Netherlands; Siwalete, C. The Netherlands; Tupanwael, E. (2001) The Netherlands.
6. Personal communication, Matitaputty, A. M. (2001) The Netherlands; Munumete-Siahaya, L. (2001) The Netherlands; Seluta, D. (2001) The Netherlands.
7. Personal communication, Sahusilawane, M. (2001) The Netherlands.
8. Personal communication, Matitaputty, A. M. (2001) The Netherlands; Munumete-Siahaya, L. (2001) The Netherlands.
9. Personal communication, Matitaputty, A. M. (2001) The Netherlands; Seluta, D. (2001) The Netherlands; Siwalete, C. The Netherlands.
10. Seluta compares them with wildflowers growing in *alang-alang* (long grass) (personal communication, Seluta, D. (2001) The Netherlands).
11. Personal communication, Seluta, D. (2001) The Netherlands.
12. Personal communication, Usman-Sinay, M. (2001) The Netherlands.
13. Bridewealth, was distinctly different from a dowry. Bridewealth was handed over by the groom's clan to the bride's clan as part of marriage settlement, whereas a dowry comprised of gifts of the bride's clan to the bride. Bridewealth had a compensatory function to make up for the transfer of a daughter. It also legitimised the union and secured eventual offspring within the husband's family, thus insuring its continuity (Cooley, 1962a, 1962b).

GLOSSARY

<i>Adat</i>	Dimension of the social system that based its origin in the indigenous foundation of Ambonese society.
<i>Ambonese</i>	Ethnic inhabitants of the central islands of the Province of Maluku: Ambon, Haruku, Saparua, Nusa Laut, as well as the <i>pasisir</i> (coastal) areas of southern and western Seram. The term ‘Ambonese’ was commonly used during Dutch colonial times.
<i>Anak J</i>	Small lock of hair twisted in a ‘J’ and gelled in place in front of the ear; also called <i>anak rambutan</i> .
<i>Anak rambutan</i>	Small lock of hair twisted in a J and gelled in place in front of the ear; also called <i>anak J</i> .
<i>Arumbai</i>	Moluccan boat.
<i>Bunga ron</i>	Wreath carved from the pith of the papaceda bush.
<i>Bunga goyang</i>	Ornamental flower-shaped hairpin on long coil that facilitates swaying of the flower.
<i>Bunga rampa</i>	Oils extracted from local flowers.
<i>Caladium leaf</i>	From Malay ‘ <i>keladi</i> ’, araceous aroid genus plant with colourful variegated foliage.
<i>Cemara</i>	False hairpiece.
<i>Dutch East-Indies</i>	Dutch colonial territory in Indonesian archipelago.
<i>Gemutu tree</i>	Palm tree.
<i>Gigi anjing</i>	Dog’s tooth shaped ribbon or ornamental jewellery placed on the forehead.
<i>Jojaro</i>	Virgin, or unmarried adolescent woman.
<i>Jungfernkranz</i>	German, virgin’s wreath.
<i>Kampung</i>	Rural village.
<i>Kepala</i>	Head of village.
<i>KNIL</i>	Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (Royal Dutch-Indonesian Army).

<i>Kondé</i>	Hair bun, placed at back of the head.
<i>Kondé besar</i>	Large hair bun, also called <i>kondé bulan</i> .
<i>Kondé bulan</i>	Hair bun, also called <i>kondé besar</i> .
<i>Kondé ékor bébek</i>	Duck tail's hair bun.
<i>Kondé falungku</i>	Fist-shaped hair bun.
<i>Korkuping</i>	Hair pin.
<i>Lokis</i>	Derived from Dutch <i>lokjes</i> , hair locks.
<i>Melati flower</i>	Jasmine flower.
<i>Mungaré</i>	Young unmarried man.
<i>Papaceda</i>	Local tree, provides marrow used for carving flower buds for hair ornaments.
<i>Rajah</i>	District head.
<i>Santen</i>	Coconut shavings.
<i>Sapalene flower</i>	Local flower.
<i>Tikam kroonci</i>	Crowning pin, derived from Dutch <i>kroontje</i> , little crown, laced with ribbons, resembled a cockade.
<i>Waringin</i>	<i>Ficus benjamina</i> tree.
<i>Zeeuwse knopjes</i>	Dutch, Zeelandian knots, silver jewellery from the Dutch province of Zeeland, used as pins and buttons on hats and jackets.

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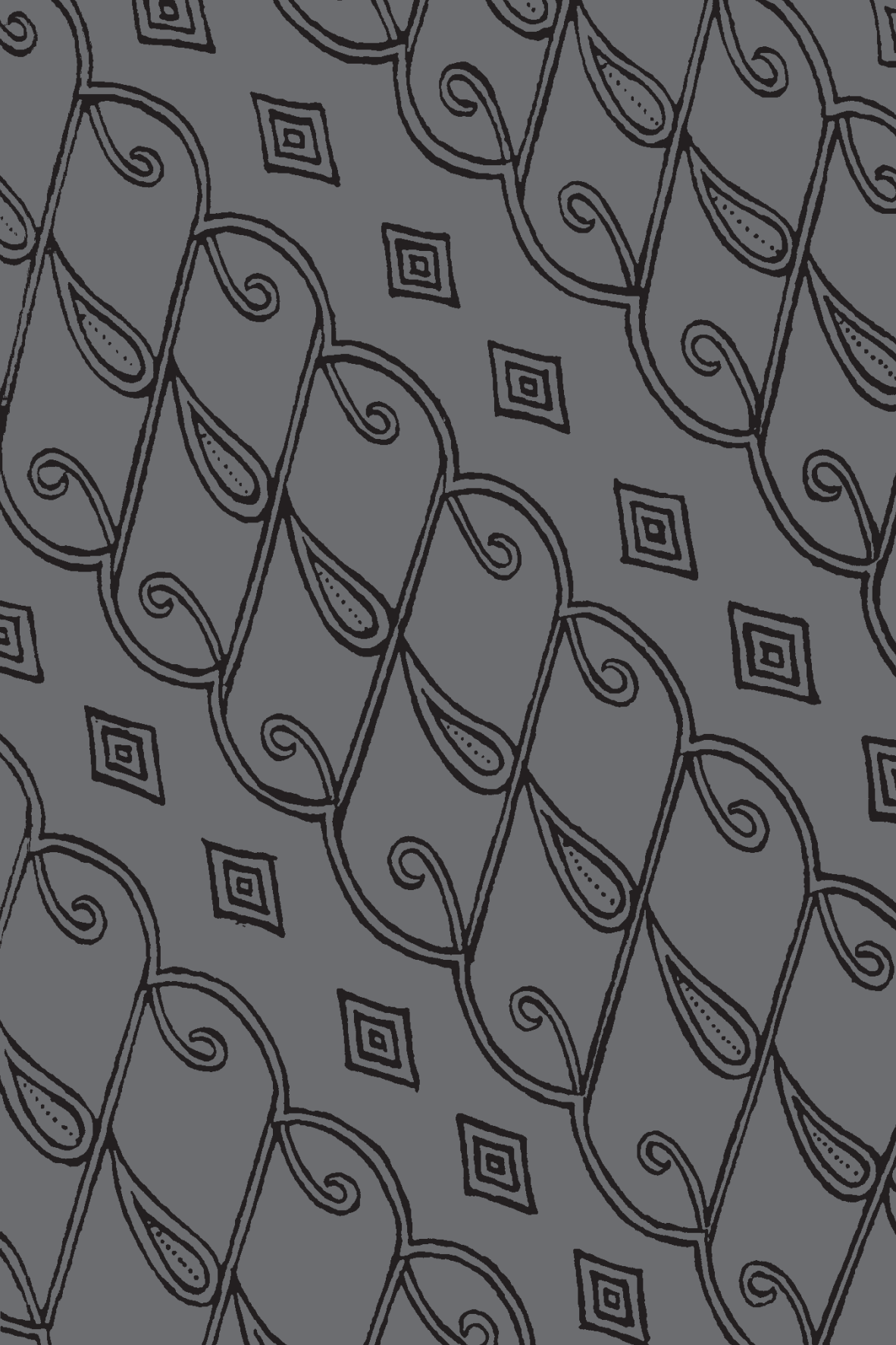
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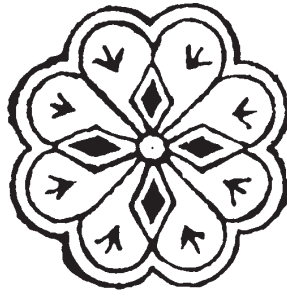
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TENSION ON THE BACK-STRAP LOOM





TENSION ON THE BACK-STRAP LOOM

Audrey Low

The *pua kumbu* is a sacred and ceremonial textile woven by Dayak Iban women on the island of Borneo. Historically, the cloth was interconnected with headhunting. When a warrior returned from headhunting expeditions, the cloth was an essential part of the elaborate welcoming ceremonies (Gavin 2004). In the ceremonies, the women, using the *pua kumbu* cloth, had to alternately receive, shield, cradle and dance with the human heads. The purpose of these acts was to coax the spirits that were believed to be residing in the heads, to linger and confer blessings on the longhouse community. Prior to the triumphant return of the warriors however, the cloth performed the function of goading and inciting the men to venture out and prove their courage (Heppell, Melak, & Usen 2006).

The blanket-sized cloth is made using the warp *ikat* method and continues to be woven on the back-strap loom. After wild cotton is harvested, spun into yarns and wrapped around the loom, the yarns are alternately pulled and stretched taut or released on the loom. The tension on the loom is concentrated on the backs of the women weavers. The right tension necessary to weave the cloth is finely and expertly calibrated by the movement of the women's bodies. Too much tension pulls the yarns apart and destroys the cloth, too little results in the threads not being taut enough to weave. Tension in this chapter is therefore, used as a positive and productive force.

This tension on the loom can be seen to represent another tension around objects of cultural significance. I apply this tension as a metaphor to describe social dynamics and articulations surrounding the *pua kumbu* cloth as it circulates through socially active regimes in contemporary Sarawak in Malaysian



Borneo. This metaphor is used to capture the current tension between so-called traditional or indigenous textile production and contemporary production for global markets. I discuss the contestation over who has the power and authority to represent culture, the roles of art in cultural institutions, and issues in the construction and representation of ‘authenticity’, ‘tradition’, and ‘modernity’ in ‘ethnic art’ markets. By highlighting the contestation around a historical textile form and examining the dynamics and interdependence of players in cultural intervention in one particular instance, this chapter sheds light on the conflicting issues involved in preserving, valorizing and producing material culture. It offers a way of analyzing competing and overlapping interventions in cultural production that has the potential to be applied elsewhere.

These topics are being addressed by other scholars on material culture who explore the tension between historical and contemporary indigenous production in textiles as well as in media other than textiles. Phillips and Steiner in *Unpacking Culture* argue that ‘a particularly dense aura of inauthenticity surrounds objects produced for the souvenir and tourist trades because they are most obviously located at the intersection of the discourses of art, artifacts, and commodity’ (1999: 4). ‘Tourist arts’, they argue, ‘offer particularly concentrated examples of the clash and resolution of culturally different ideas about the nature of authenticity’ (1999: 4). Myers examines ‘the ways in which art objects particularly are used to construct or deny identity and cultural difference’ (2001: 4) and how they ‘articulate in their circulation new relationships of power and self-revelation’ (2002: 6). Writing about Pintupi acrylic paintings by the Western Desert Aboriginal people, Myers characterises the art works as ‘hybrid constructions’ and ‘forms of activism within a multicultural context’ (2002: 5). This idea of objects as forms of activism is captured by Schrift (2001) in her study on Chairman Mao badges in China. She argues that people articulate their own meanings and wrest some degree of power around objects – even when those objects are used by the government as a means to dominate the population and disseminate propaganda. While outwardly displaying patriotism and obedience, Schrift argues that people subvert the meanings of objects, bending and manipulating the message

Pua kumbu. This cloth from the collection of the Linggi family occupies pride of place at the *Tun Jugah Foundation* gallery in Kuching.
Photograph: Audrey Low, with permission from the *Tun Jugah Foundation*



Pua kumbu woven on the back-strap loom. Photograph: Audrey Low

conveyed in official symbols into their own personal and political expression. Causey (2003), in researching Toba Batak crafts on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, examines several questions, such as, how art forms change, what it means to innovate, what is art and why some people consume, in order to understand issues surrounding authenticity and innovation. All these ideas, together with a theoretical framework constructed from a combination of Geismar (2001) and Rowlands (2002), are used to tease out the complexities and tensions in articulating culture through material means.

Tension is examined in this chapter in relation to two prominent organisations that focus their various activities on the *pua kumbu*, both of which are based in Kuching, the capital city. They are the *Iban Tun Jugah* foundation and Edric Ong's business/cultural enterprises. The two organisations can be seen as metaphors for two aspects of the tension or opposite ends of the yarns. The ambivalent relationship between the Iban staff at the foundation and Ong, a non-Iban, local Sarawak Chinese, represents the broader tension around issues of preserving and re-creating objects of cultural value. This tension is voiced around many different issues, but primarily, the contestation is about power, authority and permission. These issues are however, framed around the concepts of authenticity and respect.

The two organisations span a range of approaches to the Iban culture. The Iban foundation approaches culture as being whole and intact. Efforts are focussed on salvaging, protecting, conserving, recording, documenting and transmitting. Ong's approach is more closely aligned to one that considers culture as fragmented. He endeavours to isolate elements and reconstitute them, recreating culture on the way (see Clifford 2001; Hall 1996). Ong and the *Tun Jugah* foundation share similar intermediate goals of preserving material culture and intangible cultural heritage associated with this object (for more details on their efforts, please refer to Fifth Annual Aid to Artisans Awards 2006; Textile and Fabric: Weaving Project 2005). The difference in approach is encapsulated by their differing ultimate goals. Ong's business enterprise is ultimately geared towards maximising financial profitability. The foundation's aims point to efforts at maintaining cultural purity. The *pua kumbu* in its circulation through the foundation can be discerned as doing the political work of asserting a distinct cultural identity.

In this chapter, I outline a range of products that are currently being produced, (such as placemats, high-end fashion garments and sculptures), and identify new players, (contemporary fashion designers and emerging young Dayak Ibans artists), who are engaging in the production and marketing of these goods.

KEEPING THEM PRIMITIVE

Objects do not travel alone through the field of social relations, being wrapped in stories of their production and histories of the representations that they bear, and accompanied by songs, dances and theories making claims about their values (Townsend-Gault 1997: 142).

In a twist from the iconoclasm demanded by Christian missionaries in Indonesia in the 1920s (Corbey 2003), Jacques Maessen, a Dutch missionary, recounts how in 1974 he became the focus of a protest by Dayak Ibans in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The Ibans' historical dependence on shifting rice cultivation meant that they were forced to migrate every ten to fifteen years (Padoch 1988; Padoch & Peluso 1996). Their migration path, following major river systems, originated in Kalimantan, Indonesia, into what is now Sarawak, Malaysia. This migration began in the 1600s and intensified in the 1800s (Pringle 1970; Sandin 1956). Headhunting was their method of warfare and this feature of their violent expansion and invasion of land already occupied by other tribes, resulted in lingering resentment which continues to this day.

In the protest that Maessen describes, heirloom *pua kumbu* ikat textiles, valued highly now by anthropologists, ethnographers and art dealers, were destroyed in a mass burning. Maessen (1999) recalled that 'young Dayak women raged against me for keeping them primitive, as they said, and burned their old *ikats* in front of my house'. Historically, the *pua kumbu* was a way for women to earn status and demonstrate their ingenuity and technical expertise. The procedure of mordanting yarns, prior to dyeing and weaving, was a form of spiritual warfare or a way of managing the spiritual world. It required of the women courage equivalent to the men when decapitating enemies. To accentuate the parallel and equivalent status of these acts, this part

of the weaving procedure was called women's headhunting (For more details about the cultural significance of the object, please refer to Gavin 1996, 2004; Heppell et al. 2006; Jabu 1989, 1991; Linggi 1999, 2001; Low 2008). By the 1970s, the national focus of both Indonesia and Malaysia was on economic and social development. The Ibans in both countries were caught up in what Brosius (2003) calls the 'civil religion'. Development was conceived of and presented to the populations in terms of a linear scale. In this distribution, jungle dwellers and headhunters were characterised as being at the bottom end of the scale and as being of the past. Modernisation and urbanisation was the national goal and the way forward. The *pua kumbu*, in its direct connotations with practices of the past, such as headhunting, had therefore become a symbol of backwardness and primitivism in the national discourse – at least in the eyes of the women protesters. As an example, Maessen (1999) relates how a young Dayak man, fearing ridicule, the scorn of more urbane citizens, and possibly retribution from descendents of headhunted victims, tried to distance himself from his ancestors; 'he always told people he was Indonesian, ... frightened to death that he had to reveal his real identity, afraid to be called a primitive headhunter'.

This image of the primitive was, in the Kalimantan Ibans' relation to the outer world (Indonesia), an encumbrance. The connection between headhunting and weaving had become a tedious and derogatory association for them (Maessen 1999). In light of the problems the Ibans faced in 1974, versions of their cultural history associated with the cloth were damaging and no longer useful or accurate. These associations were at odds with how they wanted to be seen, how they wanted to express themselves and how they articulated their identity.

Maessen's anecdote serves as an introduction to the inherent tension surrounding objects that are heavily laden with cultural significance. 'Change is intrinsic to culture, and measures intended to preserve, conserve, safeguard and sustain particular cultural practices are caught between freezing the practice and addressing the inherently processual nature of culture' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 16). Maessen, keen to preserve traditional cultural heritage centred around the *pua kumbu* textiles, was caught between this tension. The weavers saw Maessen's heritage interventions as a means of keeping them frozen in time and 'slowing the rate of change' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 16). His efforts at safeguarding the cloth and maintaining the skills were interpreted

by the women as an attempt to keep the people primitive. For the Indonesian Dayak, what was articulated around the *pua kumbu*, in the seventies in rural Kalimantan, was what Saunders called, an ‘unsuitable past’ that did not fit in with their present circumstances and challenges (Saunders 1997: 116).

The *pua kumbu* cloth was a marker of an identity the Kalimantan Ibans were trying to hide. Maessen observes that there were negative connotations surrounding the object, borne of a stereotyped and essentialised image of the people who produced it. In contrast to the international art market version of the word, the meaning of primitive in the local context meant unsophisticated, uneducated and unclothed. They wanted to shed this unsuitable past that was affecting their present social and economic conditions. Their action can be interpreted as people discarding one limiting or restricting identity and opening up to different articulations and creating other possibilities. The burning of the *puas* by the weavers can be compared to similar actions by their feminist sisters in the West who in the same period in the late 1960s consumed another item of clothing by burning. The actions of these Kalimantan Ibans can be seen as people making similar statements about self-determination and liberation, as the women in the famous bra-burning protest.

However, ‘all history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary’ (Orwell 1949). Within the space of thirty years, the dynamics of heritage interventions have been completely reversed. Across the border in Sarawak, Malaysia, heritage interventions are now being initiated by the Dayaks. Now, it is an Iban foundation that is at risk of fossilising practices by attempting to freeze or slow the rate of change. The Ibans have gone from hiding or destroying the cloth because of shameful connotations with a past involving headhunting and tribal warfare, to flaunting their warrior heritage. It is now the non-Ibans, local Sarawak Chinese traders/culture brokers, who are seen as accelerating the rate of change by introducing innovation, and reconstituting fragments of Iban culture into a choreographed performance and successful marketing campaigns.

MAKING THE PAST SUITABLE

... the past requires assimilation and resurrection into an ever changing present. The problems... have not been in establishing continuity with the past therefore, but with suitable pasts. What though is to count as suitable has depended less on the reliability of historical research than on who has control of representation (Saunders 1997: 116).

The past articulations of headhunting and associations with primitivism that the Kalimantan Ibans were desperate to shed are now considered suitable. The iconic *pua kumbu* textile is embraced by the *Tun Jugah* foundation in Sarawak. The process by which these articulations became suitable was however, forged from outside the Iban community.

At about the same time that the Kalimantan Ibans were destroying their cloths and shedding an unsuitable past, Southeast Asian textiles were beginning to be valued in international collectors circles. There was a confluence of Ibans selling their heirloom *pua kumbus* and a surge of interest from Europe, America and Australia in 'primitive' art. In the 1970s the *pua kumbu* was 'discovered' by the international art market (Gavin 1996: 13). Academic scholarship in the area of Southeast Asian textiles flourished, fuelled by research by anthropologists, material culturalists, ethnographers, textile experts and art historians. Christie's held its first auction of Tribal Arts in 1976 and Sotheby's followed in 1978 (Geismar 2001: 31-2). By the 1980s 'traditional textiles' were firmly established as a field in the art market (MacClancy 1997: 21).

This trade was mediated by local Chinese residents, and this role of mediation between indigenous maker, Chinese trader and international consumers continues to the present. The surge in international demand for the object resulted in such a flow of export of heirloom *pua kumbus* that, according to Lucas Chin (interview 2004), a former museum curator, even the Sarawak Museum in Malaysia, across the border from Indonesian Kalimantan, had to race to acquire some of the fine pieces of Sarawak's cultural heritage before they were shipped overseas. The museum however faced stiff competition from local Chinese shopkeepers.

Local Chinese traders have had a long history in the Sarawak textile market. Aware of the monetary value tribal objects had gained in overseas markets, the

Chinese traders actively acquired the *pua kumbus* from local producers through various means; trade, barter, and, when harvests failed for example, they even acquired the cloths as collateral and pawned objects (Chin 2004: 22; Gavin 1996: 13; 2004: 22; Postill 2003). According to Postill, the shopkeepers valued the *pua kumbus* as trade objects, not art objects. So records about biographical, cultural or religious information were not kept. There was no provenance attached to the object. This reduced its economic value in the long term, but according to Postill, those shopkeepers were only interested in short-term gain. To the shopkeepers, the cloths were all interchangeable with each other; the level of sacredness, the status of individual weavers, or regional differences were not documented. This source of supply however, fed the international art and academic market.

The interchangeability of the cloth among the Chinese vendors was somewhat mirrored in the international art market's attitude to 'tribal', 'ethnic', 'primitive' art or textile art of Southeast Asia. According to Geismar, 'Antiquities, Pre-Columbian, African, Indonesian and Oceanic (or Pacific) arts' are all grouped into one category, to be marketed as 'inherently traditional rather than 'contemporary' (2001: 44). Only Native American and Aboriginal Australian art are sold separately and 'are the only tribal arts that are marketed as 'contemporary' fine-art' (2001: 44).

The high monetary value placed on the *pua kumbu* by overseas consumers has changed the pattern of consumption and affected how local producers view their own objects. Interest from the international art market feeds off and informs the local consumers. Global interest has increased the *pua kumbu's* value locally and renewed interest by Ibans in their own heritage. Postill relates how 'as longhouse residents have become aware of their increasing market value only destitute families are today prepared to part with their heirloom' (2003: 13). A display of *pua kumbus* or objects inspired or copied from traditional *pua kumbus* attests to the owner's personalised link to the global economy through the art world. This connection enhances and adds prestige to the Ibans' present status, alluding to the owner's taste, refinement and wealth.

The past referred to, whether it is rejected or embraced, is essentially the same for rural and urban Ibans. The difference is the present social, economic and political circumstances which, to a large extent, determine whether a past

is considered suitable or not. The lives of rural agricultural people are more directly linked with the practices and lifestyles of the past, and this lifestyle was interpreted by other Indonesians as primitive and uncivilised in the 1970s. While being labelled ‘primitive headhunters’ was a source of shame for the Kalimantan Ibans, across the border in rural Sarawak, the situation is slightly different. The *pua kumbu* is not a source of shame but it continues to be a symbol of the Iban people. Accentuating racial or tribal difference however, may not be the most advantageous tactic for rural people who are dependent on government financial assistance for survival.

Ibans from Sarawak are eligible to access financial assistance from the Malaysian government because they belong to a category of citizenship called the Bumiputera. This category includes the Malays and other indigenous peoples from East and West Malaysia, and was originally designed to exclude the migrant races, the Chinese and Indians. Complications arise however, because officially, one criteria for inclusion into the Bumiputera category is to be a practising Muslim. Many Ibans are Christians, or continue observe Iban animist practices, of which the *pua kumbu* is an essential object. So although the Ibans belong to the Bumiputera category, they can still be distinguished from the Malays by their religion. Being recognized as a Bumiputera bestows financial and social benefits and from conversations with Ibans in Kuching and Kapit, there is a perception that for Ibans to receive preferential treatment from the government, they need to not be as easily distinguishable from the Malay-Muslim Bumiputera. Using a *pua kumbu* would signify this difference and be counterproductive (for more on the discussion on Bumiputeras, please refer to Andaya & Andaya 1982; Loh 1997).

On the other end of the socio-economic scale, for the wealthy middle class Ibans, the link with primitivism is maintained through the global art market. Far from being a source of shame, for rich and powerful tribal leaders, the meanings of the label ‘primitive headhunters’ have evolved so far that, instead of hiding the connection, the political and financial elites, from the comfort of their corporation headquarters in city skyscrapers, emphasise this affiliation with the warrior heritage. Unfurling the *pua kumbu* cloth is a succinct signifier of difference from their Malay and Muslim Bumiputera siblings and they are proud to show this link with headhunters.

The *Tun Jugah* foundation works on many fronts to strengthen the link with its heritage and it achieves this aim most powerfully through its work with the *pua kumbu* cloth. In the process however, it sometimes falls into the risk of fossilising cultural practices.

THE TUN JUGAH FOUNDATION

The tension between freezing practices and addressing the processual nature of culture is examined in relation to the activities, ethos and approach of the cultural arm of the *Tun Jugah* foundation. The Dayak/Iban foundation can be seen as attempting to slow the rate of change. Its approach to culture can be interpreted as an attempt to freeze practices. Its endeavours fit in with Rowland's explanations for the various motivations behind heritage interventions; as attempts 'to salvage an essential, authentic sense of 'self' from the debris of modern estrangement', or 'because of fear of the erosive power of market economies', or even 'to cure postmodern identity crisis' (2002: 106). Tilley argues that 'there is no such thing as a traditional identity, only forms of constructing identities that might be labelled traditional by some according to particular, and ultimately, arbitrary criteria. However, the significance of tradition manifested through material forms and the social practices linked to them is difficult to overemphasise' (2006: 12). This respect paid to what it identifies as tradition is reflected in the ethos of the *Tun Jugah* foundation.

On the foundation's official website, its stated aims are to maintain the integrity of the various aspects of culture and to continue to protect the purity of traditions (*Tun Jugah Foundation* 2005). It has as an urgent and primary aim, the salvage and resurgence of Iban culture in contemporary Sarawak. The focus of this organisation is on 'authenticity' and accuracy and it achieves these aims by documenting aspects of Iban cultural heritage. During interviews, both Margaret Linggi, the (previous) director of textiles, (recently deceased), and Janet Rata Noel, the textile curator, asserted the foundation's authority to determine, define and safeguard 'authenticity'.

Expert researchers at the foundation work on many different aspects of Iban culture. It is this depth and breadth of research that Linggi uses to validate the foundation's authority over all expressions of Iban culture. The work of the

foundation can be seen as an example of an indigenous group reconfiguring the model for collaboration between academics and tribal groups (Clifford 2004). The foundation is in charge of its own ethnography. It functions as an authority and repository of the body of knowledge of Iban intangible cultural heritage. It takes on the role of guardian, steward and patron of Iban cultural identity and it funds research into Iban culture by commissioning local and foreign anthropologists, biographers and folklorists (Noel 2004, 2005). The work it does on Iban oral literature is invaluable. In an interview, Margaret Linggi (2004), explained that the foundation proactively collects, records, translates, and transcribes the songs of bards, the poetry, dirges, epic poems and stories. This includes the preservation and revival of shamanic chants (see Sather 2001). The foundation systematically identifies oral history culture bearers in the longhouses and in the cities, and records them on extensive field studies conducted by its in-house researchers. Control over the representation of Iban cultural identity is maintained with its own publishing arm which has produced the three volume Iban encyclopaedia and a biography of Tun Jugah himself (V. Sutlive & Sutlive 2001; V. H. Sutlive 1992). The Dayak cultural foundation, which is funded by the *Tun Jugah* foundation, teaches children Iban dances and the various musical instruments in the Iban orchestra (Brakel & Matusky 2002).

From an analysis of the two galleries that the foundation manages, it is evident that premium is placed on objects that were prevalent in historical Iban society. The main gallery is located in Kuching in the capital city, and a smaller gallery is situated in Kapit, a remote regional town in the Rejang district. The Rejang area in the interior of Sarawak, was politically contested, and the frequent skirmishes and outbreak of war between the Ibans, Kayan and Kenyahs, necessitated the construction of a fort in 1880. Called Fort Sylvia (named after the second Rajah Brooke's consort), the wooden structure still stands and even today dominates the entrance to Kapit. This fort built by the white Rajahs is a constant reminder of the historical enmity in the area. It represents a history of colonialism, Iban invasion, ferocious attacks and a culture celebrating decapitation of the enemy, as well as resistance from Kayan, Kenyah and other local tribal forces.

In addition to antique and heirloom *pua kumbu* cloths, the two galleries boast magnificent collections of Iban cultural artefacts, jewellery, beads, costumes, war regalia and formal dress from all the different regions in Sarawak and Kalimantan where Ibans have settled. Margaret Linggi explained that this substantial collection was amassed and inherited over a period of hundreds of years by her extended family. In the Kuching gallery, the textile department is given a place of prominence. Its many permanent weavers are housed in a plush recreation of a traditional rural longhouse gallery. They work in a modern air-conditioned gallery situated above an expensive department store in the commercial heart of Kuching. The objects showcased at the Kuching gallery include antique cloths as well as cloths woven by the resident weavers at the gallery. The prominence of the textile department demonstrates that the cloth is projected to the fore, along with the intangible cultural heritage linked to the object.

Art has become a marker for many indigenous groups, such as the Australian Aborigines, and these groups are therefore increasingly using art to define tribal identity (see Myers 2002). Ibans too have become closely associated with their artwork and the foundation uses Iban culture and objects as part of their tactics to assert a distinct identity on the local and national stage. To a large extent, the foundation has centred its cultural activities on the *pua kumbu* object. Funding for the continuity of the *pua kumbu* artistic traditions manifests in informal weaving classes that comprise the physical skills, spiritual aspects and taboos associated with the object.

At the foundation galleries, there are no depictions of the contemporary use of objects, nor are there modern manifestations of the *pua kumbu*. In contrast, areas outside of the Kuching gallery, frequented by tourists, are saturated with objects inspired from and made out of cloths printed with distinctive *pua kumbu* motifs. The gallery does not tell the story of the development or evolution of the culture. Rather, the exhibits present a snapshot of Iban culture frozen in a particular point in time.

This approach is consistent with the foundation's focus on preserving (*Tun Jugah Foundation* 2005).

Frozen in time. Iban warrior regalia featuring a breastplate made out of a clouded leopard, displayed at the *Tun Jugah Foundation* gallery
Photograph: Audrey Low



The reverence for tradition is evident in its work with the *pua kumbu*. The foundation focuses on teaching and learning skills according to traditional methods and techniques and highlights cultural significance associated with the object. Linggi stressed that in its efforts aimed at preserving the artwork, it documents and slavishly adheres to all taboos regulating the art of weaving. The weavers at the centre assiduously observe traditional taboos which include a range from simple observances, like bedding down the loom for the night in order to protect the unfinished cloth from malevolent forces, to the strict observance of protocol regarding the use of sacred or ritually powerful motifs.

This focus on tradition is highlighted by the fact that among the foundation weavers, there is a position created for a consultant who is ‘an encyclopaedia’ of taboos and customs connected with the art of *pua kumbu* weaving. This position is held by Siah Tun Jugah and she carries knowledge of the important mordanting process, the cultivation, selection and usage of plants for dyes, and all the other parts of the weaving process (*Tun Jugah Foundation* 2005). Several times during my conversations with Margaret Linggi and Janet Noel, they kept referring to Siah and honoured her as the keeper of the knowledge (Linggi, 2004; Noel, 2004, 2005). The foundation supports the weavers who are the living culture bearers, and these women weavers in turn carry the riches of historical Iban cultural knowledge, and disseminate it to the next generation.

Attempts to freeze practices are however, complicated by the view that, according to Clifford (2000; 2001; 2004), cultural identity is constantly evolving, has no rigid borders, is constantly being reborn and reconstituted from fragments. In other words, it is articulated. Clifford (2001) argues that articulation is necessary for cultures to ‘survive’. To a certain extent, all performances, even for local Iban audiences in the longhouse gallery, are constructed; ‘all traditions have to start somewhere, and at some time, and therefore may be said to be invented’ (Tilley 2006: 12). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett stresses that ‘all heritage interventions – like the globalising pressures they are trying to counteract – change the relationship of people to what they do. They change how people understand their culture and themselves. They change the fundamental conditions for cultural production and reproduction’ (2006: 16).

The view of culture as being articulated, constructed, invented and constantly changing is a contrast to the foundation’s approach. The

foundation's goals and activities indicate an alignment with an approach that views culture as an organic whole that can be salvaged, documented, preserved and transmitted intact to the next generation. Focussing on the *pua kumbu* however, forces the foundation to address the tension between freezing what it identifies as traditional or unchanging aspects of Iban culture, and addressing the intrinsically processual nature of culture. This is because the object, while forming historical links to previous generations, also encapsulates change. Change is woven into the inherently processual process of mordanting yarns in preparation for dyeing the *pua kumbu*.

The *pua kumbu* drew centuries of admiration and devotion on the part of the women weavers and other members of the Iban community. The women committed themselves to developing and perfecting the skills set and techniques the object demanded. A significant part of the process was the mordanting procedure. Essentially, mordanting is the process where the naturally occurring layers of oils on wild cotton yarns are stripped away, allowing the dyes to adhere to the yarns. Ingredients for the mordant bath were historically sourced from the jungle. Wild ginger, nuts and seeds, tree bark and roots of shrubs, all contributed to the mix. The problem was that the variations in the chemical content of these ingredients meant that instead of prescribing set amounts for the concoction, the master dyer had to experiment and carefully observe nuances in the chemical reactions. Expertise in the art therefore required a scientific mindset rather than rote learning of a collection of formulas and a set series of steps in an unchanging process. This stage was notoriously difficult and consequently an aura of mystique developed around the few women who could master the art. The body of knowledge was not easily learned or transmitted and the skilful observations and subtle adjustments seemed to border on being beyond teaching or documenting. The women appeared to develop a sense of feeling or a deep knowing for the elements. Knowledge of the reactions and capabilities of the various compounds was so sophisticated it was considered magical, esoteric and fraught with danger to the uninitiated. Not surprisingly, the greatest number of taboos surrounded this process. The few women who could consistently produce the desired results were regarded with the highest esteem and called women warriors (for more details on the mordanting process, please refer to Gavin 2004; Jabu 1991).

What is recognised today as taboos were however, not about freezing practices. The inconsistencies in the chemical compositions of the ingredients essentially forced the master dyers to observe closely and constantly adjust and make changes. The process of making the mordant bath therefore accommodated, and in fact demanded, a fluidity in approach. In its work on heritage conservation, the foundation is confronted with the challenges of calibrating the tension between trying to freeze and fossilise aspects of Iban cultural practices and addressing the inherently processual nature of cultural development. This tension applies to its work with the *pua kumbu*, but it is not limited to the textile artform, as this tension is present in its works with Iban oral literature and other forms of intangible cultural heritage.

EDRIC ONG

Edric Ong is a local Sarawak Chinese identity from a well-known Hokkien family in Kuching. Trained as an architect, he is also a fashion designer, president of the local art organisation, and a staunch Christian. He is acknowledged as being a consummate promoter of Iban art and cultural heritage. For twenty years he has focused his talents on the concerted marketing of indigenous tribal art as contemporary fine art. His successful business fosters international recognition for the quality of Sarawak tribal artwork and it is largely through his efforts that the *pua kumbu* now enjoys a high reputation in collectors circles overseas.

The *pua kumbu* textiles, which he specialises in, form the core objects in his shop/gallery but they are not the extent of his business. He is active in promoting tribal art from other regions of the world. By developing the *pua kumbu* as an object for academic research and regularly hosting the *World Eco-Fibre and Textile forum*, or *WEFT*, he has contributed to the tribal textile and heritage world and created an international reputation for himself as a culture broker. Demand for silk *pua kumbus* is fuelled by him, his personality, his renown and art world connections (see for example, his outlet in the United States: Edric Ong Textile Gallery 1 2007).

Ong's activities with the cloth can be seen to address the processual nature of culture. He introduced innovation into the art with his initiative to replace cotton yarns with silk and was therefore pivotal in developing new materials



Pua kumbu motifs reproduced on a shawl
by local Kuching designer, Tom Abang
Photograph: Audrey Low

for the cloth. A collector of *pua kumbus* himself, he is also notable for designing and manufacturing modern manifestations of the *pua kumbu*. A diverse range of objects inspired by the *pua* are sold in his shop and targeted at the up-market tourist/collectors niche, with prices to match. (Ong's company, 'Fabriko' has since been sold to the *Chop Chin Nam Company*, but the *pua kumbu* inspired merchandise remains a major part of the business. The 'Edric Ong' shop, a few doors down the road on Main Bazaar, is still owned by Ong).

Historically, the *pua* would have been very rarely seen, visible only as part of shamanic healing rituals and at life crisis moments. Now, a tourist walking around the shops in Main Bazaar, the premier shopping precinct for tourists in Kuching, would see almost blanket coverage of red hues. Tourists are treated to a visual display starting at the arrival hall at Kuching airport, and moving on to other venues; hotel lobbies, *Sarawak Craft Council*, the Kuching waterfront, to restaurant menus and shopping malls. At the Tom Abang boutique for example, there are multi-coloured shawls decorated with *pua* motifs.

Few of these cloths would be the original and sacred blanket-sized *pua kumbus*. Instead what a tourist is likely to see is *pua kumbu* motifs reproduced in various permutations.

When I was walking through the tourist precinct in Kuching, I could see inexpensive batik-style sarongs made of printed *pua* designs. These were sold among the sarongs made in various parts of Indonesia and Malaysia and were called Borneo designs. My initial reaction was disappointment at seeing such sacred cloths reduced to cheap printed sarongs. Originally, I saw this as exploitation and breaches of copyright of these designs. Copyright infringement in Malaysia is hard to enforce even with the best resources and/or will. Breaches in copyright of artistic, cultural or intellectual property appear to be foreign concepts. However, after travelling a long distance upriver by a series of boats to the remote *Rumah Garie* longhouse, one of the first things I noticed in a master weaver's apartment was a lounge chair decorated with fabric printed with *pua kumbu* designs. When I looked closely at the women's attire, I found that several of the weavers, Bangie, Nancy and Mula, and other women in the longhouse, were all wearing the printed sarongs I saw in Kuching. I commented on the phenomenon to Nancy and she beamed with pride and said, 'This is my design'.



Nancy Ngali, a master weaver from *Rumah Garie*, wearing a printed sarong of her own *pua kumbu* design. Photograph: Audrey Low



Pua kumbu inspired vest in Edric Ong's shop. Photograph: Audrey Low

Far from considering herself a victim of infringement, this reproduction of her design on a massive scale was a form of ‘publication’ and was a point of pride for her. It was acknowledgement of the exquisiteness of her design, to her and the longhouse residents. The bales of printed cotton cloth, sold for less than two American dollars a meter in the city, contribute to the enhancement of Nancy’s renown throughout the longhouse. As it did in the past, good designs still contribute to a woman’s reputation and renown.

The manufacturers of these *pua* inspired objects copy once sacred designs, like Nancy’s *puas*, and apply them onto a wide range of objects for the art and tourist market. Motifs are reproduced on objects that bear little resemblance to previous spiritual connotations or sacredness of the *pua kumbu*. Yet depending on the price of the object, these modern manifestations are made to bear a semblance of the same cultural load that the original form did. For example, walking around Kuching, a tourist would see cheap objects sold without any explanations or labels. On the internet however, in order to justify high prices, some objects wrongly labelled *pua kumbu*, would be accompanied by lengthy explanations of historical cultural uses. The intention, presumably, is to give buyers the indication that the object for sale is the same as an old, blanket-sized, sacred *pua kumbu*, used previously for headhunting and shamanism.

Pua kumbu motifs are isolated, lifted off the cloth, copied, derived and manipulated as graphic design. With the addition of synthetic dyes, the restricted palette of old *pua kumbus* is expanded to include all colours. Motifs are cut into wooden blocks and block printed or silkscreen printed onto bales of cotton, silk or polyester textiles. These cloths are then cut and made into scarves, cushion covers and curtains. Edric Ong’s shop sells a variety of these printed silk fabrics, some of which are made into shirts that retail for about US\$150. Motifs are enlarged, repeated into patterns, reconstituted in various permutations and reproduced onto multiple objects for the tourist market. These objects include bags, mobile phone cases, place mats, T shirts and carpets. Modern manifestation of the *pua kumbu* also include a category of objects bearing motifs of indeterminable tribal inspiration and influence, distilled from various design features of Southeast Asian tribes. These are sold as *pua kumbus*, along with other tribal/primitive objects, and marketed as local and indigenous. The weavers at *Rumah Garie* themselves contribute to this range of objects.

When I visited, all the weavers in the longhouse were involved in a big order for a hotel in Kuala Lumpur for bedspreads woven with *pua* motifs. Apart from this order, their repertoire of objects include the ubiquitous smaller hand-woven cloth placemats, wall hangings and table runners.

When tourists purchase and wear items of clothing, such as one of Edric Ong's silk shirts or vests, or Tom Abang's shawls, the *pua* motifs can be seen to circulate on the bodies of these foreign tourists. The tourists themselves therefore contribute to the sea of *pua kumbu* motifs circulating through Kuching, reinforcing its importance. When these motifs circulate through Kuala Lumpur via the tourists, they become a reaffirmation of the Sarawak and Malaysian tourism boards' strategy of highlighting and marketing indigenous cultures. Not only can myths and folklore be 'attractive tourism products' as a local politician once claimed, so too can the motifs of animist and non-Islamic headhunting objects (Myths and Folklore Legends Can Be Attractive Tourism Products 2003). When the tourists travel home with their souvenirs of *pua* inspired clothing, the articulations around the motifs then take on meanings of, among other things, an exotic holiday in the east, in the land of the headhunters of Borneo.

Apart from designing and manufacturing modern manifestations of the *pua*, Ong's most significant innovation is concentrated in his marketing skills. He is an effective campaigner, intermediary and culture broker for tribal or indigenous art. Consequently, he has achieved success in his efforts at identifying, developing and educating new markets for the *pua kumbu* product and other tribal art of Sarawak (Hooi 2006). Ong's success at marketing stems from his ability to articulate and manipulate culture in the sense that Clifford (2001) describes in *Indigenous Articulations*. Fragments of Iban cultural expressions, meanings and practices are reconstituted, joined in surprising combinations and choreographed into an effective marketing strategy. Ong's enterprise is set up as a business and survives on profits; to that end marketing and publicizing the object are essential to the success of the enterprise. By using the intangible cultural heritage surrounding the *pua* in an innovative way, he adds value when marketing the object for international consumption. However, it is this aspect of Ong's activities around the *pua kumbu* that is the cause of the strongest tensions with the Iban foundation.

The literature liberally positioned in Ong's gallery catalogues his efforts at revitalising an ancient art. They note the steps he is taking to salvage the technical and scientific (chemical) skills and knowledge developed by Ibans and passed down through the generations to master weavers today, thereby ensuring the survival of the art. Framed newspaper articles and copies of books on *pua kumbus*, ikat weaving and information about eco-textiles displayed in his shop in Kuching pay tribute to his important role in ensuring that the retention and acquisition of skill levels necessary to weave these complicated and sophisticated pieces remains economically viable.

In recognition of all his efforts, the New York-based, Aid to Artisan organisation, bestowed him with the aid to artisan advocacy award in 2006 (Fifth Annual Aid to Artisans Awards 2006). He works with the ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association (AHPADA) in collaboration with UNESCO. Together, these two organisations award the *UNESCO-AHPADA Crafts Seal of Excellence for Handicraft Products in Southeast Asia*. This award pays 'careful regard to cultural authenticity and environmental conservation' (AHPADA Seal of Excellence for Handicraft Products in Southeast Asia 2004). *Pua kumbu* inspired designs created under his auspices won the award in 2001 (prior to Ong becoming president of the organisation in 2004). His efforts in marketing and promotion are consistent with the goals of UNESCO-AHPADA, which amongst others are to: 'develop and promote the marketing of crafts, strengthen and improve the status of crafts people, create employment opportunities especially in the rural areas and preserve traditional craft skills within the context of conservation of cultural heritage' (Ong 2004: 1).

Ong bridges the gap between the *pua kumbu* and its various social networks by means of his skills as a promoter and marketer. He is more reflexive and in tune with the demands of the global market than the *Tun Jugah* foundation. He has expert ability which is imperative in transcending borders and narrowing the gap between the object and its potential global audiences and consumers. This mediation is especially important as new or non-Iban audiences do not share knowledge of Iban religion, oral history and literature, or have familiarity with Iban performances. His extensive circle of influence spans the local scene and extends to global organisations. Some marketing is aimed at local, wealthy, urban middle-class Iban elites and other Malaysians such as dignitaries and

government ministers, and he also has contacts in foreign embassies, as well as organisations like the Delphic Games and Atelier, the art society in Kuching. The main thrust of his marketing however, is aimed at an international audience. This market includes a network of textile experts, scholars, gallery and museum curators, university academics, tribal art collectors, cultural and heritage organisations, and antique collectors.

Ong's construction of Iban culture in the late 2000s, embraces the articulations that the Kalimantan Dayaks, referred to at the beginning of this article, tried to shed in the 1970s. Ong's construction of authenticity wrapping the object mines seams in Iban mythic and gendered landscapes. The cultural load that the object bore historically forms a significant part of the appeal of the high-end *pua kumbus* sold as art. Historical meanings and contexts where the object would have been used are amplified in the publicity and packaging and form a part of an arsenal of marketing tools. He builds on and repackages past articulations and weaves selected aspects of cultural expressions together. Elements of intangible cultural heritage and meanings are layered over new sources of stories. New religion, Christianity in this case, is layered over old Iban spirituality and shamanism. In his travels Ong experiments with and injects new inflections into cultural performances, adjusting the combinations of weavers and musicians. He attaches these articulations to the original form of the *pua kumbu* as well as modern manifestations of the cloth.

This process of value adding is what Rowlands (2002) terms 'commodification of the past' and Geismar (2001) labels, the 'construction of authenticity'. Geismar explains this process and its relation to the pricing of (tribal) art objects at auctions in Europe and North America:

It is necessary to understand the peculiar commodity status of tribal art: each object's price is defined in relation to an identity selected from its various cultural histories. This selective presentation of the relation of object to context exploit a classificatory device commonly called 'authenticity', which, for the purposes of tribal art market, is used in a highly strategic and not necessarily consistent or coherent manner (Geismar 2001: 26).

Ong's introduction of innovation to the art can be seen as changing cultural practices at a faster rate than some Ibans are comfortable with. Or, seen from

another point of view, this contest is reminiscent of Myer's observations of Australian Aboriginal art: 'the circulation of acrylic paintings was not (and is not) contained easily within a single régime of value. Neither simply commodity nor fully sacred object' (Myer 2002: 6). In an interview with Janet Noel (2004), the curator of the textile department, and various high-ranking, knowledgeable Iban culture bearers or staff members at the *Tun Jugah* foundation, the tension was palpable when the discussion turned to Edric Ong. The sentiments expressed were that Ong was pushing at the boundaries of what was considered acceptable as culturally appropriate and sensitive ways to consume the object. They expressed that Ong proceeded without consultation or the support and permission of the foundation. They felt aggrieved that what they considered their cultural property was being marketed as a product. Ong, a non-Iban, was profiting from commercial use and sale of Iban cultural objects. This tension was illustrated by two examples that the weavers provided.

The first example was an incident at an international conference on textiles in Thailand. Weavers and culture bearers, members of the foundation and representatives from various international art and academic organisations were present. The staff members described how Ong made a grand entrance into the meeting room, wearing a high status and sacred *pua kumbu*, which he had cut, and was wearing as a poncho. Surrounded by tribal culture bearers who continue to attach mysticism to the cloth, the weaver of that particular *pua*, who happened to be present, was appalled and humiliated by that performance. Apart from being interpreted as a clear cultural slight to the Ibans present, the performance had the added element of being interpreted as a personal slight. Noel explained that the weaver had attained high status. The cause of consternation could have been that Ong singled out her cloth to be cut instead of another piece. To her, it indicated that her cloth was not valued as highly as other pieces. The valuable ones would be sold whole as artwork, rather than as a prop for a performance or a grand entrance. This light-hearted show, apart from being insensitive to the artist, was not well received by the other Iban culture bearers present. The staff explained that they were taken aback for several reasons. He had used a sacred *pua* in a manner that offended the cultural values of the producers. They emphasised that the object still carries a patina of the sacred. It was an object to be treated with respect and not one to be cut and

made into a makeshift item of clothing. They were at pains to explain that a *pua kumbu* is not an ordinary piece of clothing worn by laypeople. Only initiated shamans wear them, and they only wear them when performing sacred rituals at life crisis moments.

Ceremonial Iban finery used in a non-ceremonial context was the next example the staff provided. In 2004, an exhibition entitled '*Bejalai – A Malaysian-Australian Journey*' was held in Kuala Lumpur at the Australian High Commission. Nancy Ngali and Bangie Embol, the same weavers I had visited in their longhouse home, were featured at a live demonstration of weaving on a back-strap loom. What was unusual about the demonstration was that Nancy and Bangie were sitting on the floor, dressed resplendently in ceremonial Iban finery complete with massive silver headdresses. A photographic image of Bangie in ceremonial dress while at the loom has since been reproduced onto a giant poster that graces the entrance of Edric Ong's shop in Kuching. This image of the weaver sitting on the floor, in what is essentially wedding finery, was considered humourous to the staff. For appropriate weaving attire the staff referred me to a framed picture hanging in the foundation building. The pencil drawing by Monica Freeman in the 1950s depicts a bare-breasted weaver dressed only in a plain black homespun skirt.

The problem the staff voiced with the ceremonial finery is difficult to pinpoint. The sentiments were couched around the problem of superimposing one aspect of Iban culture, that is traditional ceremonial Iban attire worn at weddings or harvest festivals, onto another unrelated context, weaving. It is true that in the longhouse in the past, women did not weave in their bridal costume, but neither did they wear casual western clothing, like the foundation weavers wear today in the Kuching gallery. Neither of these images fit the 1950s drawing. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that heritage interventions are about slowing the rate of change. The difficulty in reconciling the three images indicate that the tension between the two organisations is not about authenticity, but rather contestation about control over the nature, degree and speed of change and also about the tangible and on-going material representation of the Iban.

Ong's reconstitution of Iban culture from fragments is not bound by tradition or restricted by historical Iban cultural taboos. The fact that he is not Iban, means that he is not constrained by having to portray a culturally

and historically accurate representation of Iban culture. This freedom to choreograph the performance, using all elements available, without having to slavishly follow ‘tradition’, could be one reason why Ong’s representations of Iban culture are more flamboyant and consequently well received overseas. His focus is now on international audiences. Apart from being more lucrative, the international markets and venues mean that he is removed from intense scrutiny and critique by culture bearers. Decisions to include the spectacular and eye-catching headdresses and ceremonial or wedding finery, even if the context is not entirely accurate or authentic, fit in to this successful marketing strategy borne of the freedom to innovate without many restrictions. Such means of marketing are used the world over by indigenous groups to market their wares. In this sense, the representation of the Iban weaver, as highly cultured and well dressed, was not out of line with international norms.

When the Iban foundation staff discuss their problem with Ong, I discern that their predicament lies in the fact that he is a non-Iban marketing what is identified as the singularly most culturally significant object for the Ibans. The foundation staff have difficulties in reconciling traditional Iban values of aversion to self-promotion, of elevating oneself or praising one’s own art, with the kind of marketing necessary to promote a product. Ong, on the other hand, has developed marketing strategies that are effective to the extent that his name brand, not the foundation’s, is more closely associated with the object internationally. At this point in time, Ong is in control of telling the story of the Ibans to an international audience. He wields control over reconstituting fragments, constructing the narrative and choreographing elements of Iban culture. The foundation is not the most vocal or well-known voice, nor does it orchestrate the performance of Iban cultural identity to the outside world. The representation of Ibans, in relation to the *pua kumbu*, to an international audience, is therefore outside the authority, influence and control of Ibans. Likewise, the speed of change surrounding the *pua kumbu* is in the hands of a non-Iban. Ong can be seen as testing the tensile strength of the yarns. His articulations can be seen as challenging the limits to which art objects, or their motifs that were/are considered sacred or religious, can be copied, reproduced and made into new objects. Ong’s articulations push at boundaries where elements of intangible cultural heritage can be reconstituted to form part of a marketing strategy.

PULLING IN MANY DIRECTIONS

This essay explored the tension, represented by the back-strap loom, between freezing and addressing the processual nature of culture. The tensions around the cloth pull in many directions. With the emergence of new tribal artists, control in the hands of one Iban organisation, no matter how well funded, is even more elusive. The tension now comes from within the Iban tribe. New generations of tribal artists are pulling the *pua kumbu* in even more directions. They push at boundaries, exploring new articulations to suit the present dynamics and circumstances. Emerging tribal artists are exploring their artistic heritage, embracing their cultural histories and creating new articulations around modern manifestations of the *pua kumbu*. With this new generation of artists, the tension around the *pua kumbu* does not centre on the cloth alone anymore. The weaver continues to manipulate and control the message and meanings on the original form. Some segments of the audience continue to share an understanding for deeper, more personal, spiritual, psychological or dream-inspired meanings. However, the object now morphs and takes on many forms. With modern manifestations the motifs themselves, removed from the cloth, have come to play a role.

In 2005, final year students from the faculties of art, marketing and graphic design at the University of Malaysia, Sarawak, UNIMAS held an exhibition at the Kuching pavilion. At the exhibition, there was a notable wealth of artwork inspired by the material culture of the various tribes in Sabah and Sarawak. There were objects inspired by Bidayuh embroidery, jewellery and decorations inspired by Bajau women head-dresses, and sculptures exploring the Iban concept of ngayau – travelling in war parties, with the Iban sword and shield. There were cartoons of cultural heroes, warriors and demons.

Among the exhibits there were two featuring the *pua kumbu*. One featured *pua kumbu* motifs used as decoration on stationery and packaging paper. This project had the sponsorship and support of the *Tun Jugah* Foundation. In another exhibit, artist Jackson Seliman reproduced isolated, striking and graphic elements of *pua kumbu* motifs, and transformed them to a different material. His series of four life-size bronze sculptures depict women in the shape of individual *pua* motifs.

He explains that the figures are ‘a painstaking effort to document my translations of the narrative symbols and the motifs that represent the spirit of ancient dreams’ (Seliman 2005). In this artwork, Seliman has managed to evoke generations of weavers passing down their individual skills, expertise, knowledge and stories, and the fame and status associated with certain cloths or categories of themes or ancestors. These sculptures also represent a crossover between women’s art and men’s art, men making sculptures and effigies out of wood, women weaving.



Pua kumbu motifs transferred to a series of four life-size sculptures, entitled 'Pua' by emerging Iban artist, Jackson Seliman, displayed at the University of Malaysia, (Sarawak) exhibition
Photograph: Audrey Low

The involvement of emerging Iban artists, with their own interpretation and ownership of their culture, use of new media, methods of publicity, marketing and political activism, focuses attention back to tensions around the cloth. Although the *Tun Jugah* foundation and Edric Ong can be seen as pulling against each other, they are not necessarily cast in an antagonistic relationship. Although there are discernible tensions between the two organisations at present which are articulated around the cloth, the model for the relationship can be synergistic rather than antagonistic. This contestation pushes each side to clarify, defend and make the articulations more robust. The tension nudges them to find areas of agreement and to find ways of collaborating or to unite in opposition to other articulations.

Once the cloth is cut from the weaver's loom, it is cut adrift from the backs of the weavers and their personal dreams, intentions and messages, and circulates in various non-Iban locales. Over a prolonged period of time different organisations and people, from within the community and outside, come into the object's sphere and pull it in many different directions. The development in the tensions around the *pua kumbu* has pulled so far it has moved beyond the original form of the sacred blanket-size cloth. Tensions are now active around *pua kumbu* motifs reproduced on other objects. Emerging generations of Iban artists are now articulating Iban cultural identity around motifs reproduced onto other objects. These are the tensions or dynamics pulling at the object at a particular point in time, to suit the present sets of circumstances and that fit current interests and challenges. The *pua kumbu* has journeyed far from the tropical rainforests that inspired it. It still evokes ideas of ancient lifestyles in the jungle. These romanticised notions are actively marketed locally and overseas. New meanings are layered over old connotations creating rich and unexpected articulations for a tribal object finding its way out of the jungle.

GLOSSARY

<i>AHPADA</i>	ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association.
<i>ASEAN</i>	Association of South-East Asian Nations.
<i>Backstrap loom</i>	A weaving loom with one end tied to a post and the other end tied to the back of the weaver. The weaver calibrates the tension of the yarns with the movement of her body.
<i>Bejalai</i>	Men's journeys and expeditions, historically undertaken for adventure and also to acquire prestige.
<i>Bumiputera</i>	A term coined in West Malaysia to incorporate Malays (who are (Muslims) and the indigenous people from Peninsular Malaysia, and Sabah and Sarawak. This category of citizenship excludes the migrant Indian and Chinese races. The Dayaks from Sarawak now call themselves minority <i>Bumiputeras</i> to distinguish themselves from the majority Muslim <i>Bumiputeras</i> .
<i>Dayak</i>	A word coined by the Dutch colonists to refer to non-Muslim local residents. This term has been adopted by the Ibans.
<i>Headhunting</i>	Men's headhunting was the Iban method of war, and incidents continued to be reported until the late 1950s and 1960s. Historically, there was a spiritual aspect to this practice. Weaving the <i>pua kumbu</i> (as opposed to other types of weaving Iban women did) was seen as a parallel act.
<i>Women's headhunting, women's war</i>	(See mordanting) The process of mordanting yarns before the dyeing and weaving process was called women's headhunting or women's war. This is because the process was considered spiritual in nature.
<i>Iban</i>	Originally from Kalimantan, Indonesia, the Iban people migrated into Sarawak beginning in the 1600s.

<i>Ikat</i> (warp <i>ikat</i>)	<i>Ikat</i> is part of the dyeing process in weaving. It is the process of wrapping sections of warp threads with <i>lemba</i> leaves or raffia string so that the tied off areas resist the dye during the dye process. Pua kumbu cloths are usually dipped in dye several times. Once dipped in red, the tied off sections of the yarns are then cut open to reveal undyed sections. New sections are then tied off, and the yarns are dipped in other colours, such as indigo.
<i>Kalimantan</i>	The southern half of the island of Borneo, now part of Indonesia.
<i>Mordanting</i>	The process where the naturally occurring oils on cotton yarns are stripped, to enable dyes to adhere to the yarns. The chemicals used in this process are sourced from jungle vegetation. This complicated and spiritual process is taboo laden.
<i>Rajah</i>	King. James, Charles and Vyner Brooke were known as the White Rajahs of Borneo and they ruled Sarawak from 1841-1941.

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